

**Security Council**

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Report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement**I. Introduction**

1. The present report covers developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 5 January 2018 and is submitted pursuant to resolution 2348 (2017), in which the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to update it in writing every 45 days on political and technical progress and obstacles to the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement.

II. Key political developments related to the implementation of the agreement

2. Heightened tensions and deepening divergences over the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement have marked the reporting period, with the Majorité présidentielle and most actors of the political opposition still at odds over key issues. While the Majorité présidentielle appears to have maintained its focus on preparations for the planned elections, the opposition continues to call for protests to force the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila, out of office. Meanwhile, in recent weeks, the Comité laïc de coordination (CLC) — a group of Catholic activists — has emerged as the most active actor on the political scene.

3. Following the 31 December and early January protests, the Government held an extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers on 5 January and issued a statement in which it accused the Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Laurent Monsegwo Pasinya, of insulting the country's leaders and its security forces and characterized the 31 December protests as insurrectionist efforts by the Catholic Church and the primary security threat facing Kinshasa.

4. Following its call for popular protests on 31 December 2017 to demand the full implementation of the year-old political agreement, CLC, supported by the Catholic Church, opposition parties and a number civil society groups, called for yet another day of nationwide demonstrations on 21 January to reiterate the same demand. This led to an escalation of rhetoric between supporters of President Kabila and those of Cardinal Monsegwo Pasinya and a series of clashes with security forces, during which 6 people were killed in Kinshasa and 68 people were wounded and at least 121 were arbitrarily arrested across the country.



5. At a mass held in Kinshasa on 23 January, two days after the deadly protests, Cardinal Monsengwo Pasinya denounced restrictions on the freedom of religion and the freedom of movement of members of the Catholic congregation.

6. On 26 January, President Kabila held a press conference, his first in five years, during which he stressed that, as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission, presidential elections would take place on 23 December 2018 and lead to a transfer of power. When asked whether he would run for re-election, the President pointed to the Constitution, which bars him from holding a third term in office. Reacting to the violence in the context of public protests, the President noted that peaceful demonstrations should be permitted, adding that those organizing demonstrations should be held accountable if they turn violent. He also called on the Parliament to examine laws on public demonstrations.

7. On 27 January, some opposition leaders held their own press conferences. The leader of the Union pour la nation congolaise, Vital Kamerhe, deplored the fact that the confidence-building measures envisaged in the 31 December 2016 agreement had not been implemented, adding that opposition figures remained in jail or lived in hiding and that the President's views did not correspond with those of the rest of the country. The leader of the Groupe des sept coalition of political parties, Pierre Lumbi, expressed concern that the President was not responding to the aspirations of the citizens.

III. Key electoral developments related to the implementation of the agreement

Electoral developments

8. At a press conference held on 31 January, the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission announced the conclusion of the voter registration process. According to the Commission, over 46 million potential voters have now been registered across the 26 provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is well above the 41 million initially expected. Among those registered, 47 per cent are women.

9. During the reporting period, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continued to support the voter registration efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission. The Mission has made 64,000 litres of fuel available to the Commission for the operationalization of the last voter registration centres in the Kasai Province. The funding of the Democratic Republic of the Congo electoral support project, a multi-partner basket fund managed by UNDP, initially budgeted at \$123.3 million, was revised downward to \$65.5 million. Discussions with the Commission concerning finalization of the project are ongoing.

10. On 5 January, the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission launched the voter sensitization campaign on the use of the voting machines in Kinshasa. The Commission plans to use a total of 106,000 voting machines during the upcoming elections. In recent weeks, political actors from the opposition and some international partners have expressed reservations regarding the use of voting machines in the upcoming elections, arguing that they could be used for election fraud. The Commission claims instead that their use will reduce cost and fraud.

11. In December, the Government Spokesperson and Minister of Communications, Lambert Mende, announced that the Government would launch the disbursement of a monthly instalment of \$60 million to the Commission in January, in view of the

planned elections. As at 31 January, the Government had not yet disbursed the January instalment.

Restrictions on political space and violence related to the implementation of the political agreement in the electoral context

12. During the reporting period, authorities continued to prohibit and repress protests by opposition political parties and civil society organizations. During the 21 January protests, at least six people were killed in Kinshasa, including two women. Across the country, 68 persons were injured and 121 persons, including 4 children, were arbitrarily arrested. Victims included priests and members of civil society organizations and opposition parties.

13. In the context of those protests, MONUSCO teams were attacked by security forces. In Kinshasa, a MONUSCO human rights officer who was monitoring the events at Saint Michel church in the Bandalungwa commune was beaten by the military police, who also fired tear gas towards a MONUSCO patrol. Two MONUSCO teams were threatened and forced to withdraw. MONUSCO teams were also denied access to information and to many sites, including morgues, hospitals and detention facilities.

14. Reports of harassment or threats by Congolese authorities aimed at restricting the work of national or international journalists and restrictions on freedom of information and freedom of expression increased over the reporting period. Those affected included journalists working for Radio Okapi, a broadcaster owned and operated by the Mission. In Kisangani, a Radio Okapi journalist and a driver covering the demonstrations were threatened and chased by members of the Republican Guard. On 2 January, at a morgue in Kinshasa, the military police arrested the correspondent of Radio France Internationale, who was covering the events of 31 December. Following advocacy efforts by MONUSCO, the journalist was released later that day, along with three persons the journalist had interviewed.

15. In January, MONUSCO published its annual analysis of the human rights situation in 2017, highlighting that 1,375 alleged violations related to democratic space were documented during the year. This represents an increase of 25 per cent compared with 2016 and indicates the continuous shrinking of democratic space and increasing restrictions on civil and political rights. State agents continue to be responsible for most of the alleged violations (97 per cent of the total), including 712 by the Congolese National Police, 269 by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 153 by political/administrative authorities and 135 by officers of the Agence nationale du renseignement. Alleged violations mainly consisted of arbitrary arrests and detentions, violations of the rights to freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly, and the targeting of human rights defenders, political opponents and journalists. Perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity, with no significant investigation, follow-up or convictions in any of the cases recorded.

Confidence-building measures

16. Progress in the implementation of the confidence-building measures has been slow and remains incomplete. The Government has yet to take adequate steps to fully open the political space and create an environment conducive to the holding of credible elections. Over the past 12 months, only a few demonstrations organized by parties of the Majorité présidentielle have been authorized, and demonstrations organized by opposition parties and civil society groups have been systematically forbidden. MONUSCO remains engaged with the Government to facilitate the authorization of peaceful demonstrations, including by developing a code of conduct

and working with protest organizers to ensure the peaceful nature of any demonstrations.

17. Twenty-five political prisoners were released during the period under review. On 26 January, the Minister of Justice, Alexis Thambwe Mwamba, announced the release of 10 additional prisoners covered by a 2014 amnesty. Ninety political prisoners remain in detention. The Government has agreed to discuss these cases with MONUSCO and to have a regular exchange of information. The Government has also agreed to review the emblematic case of the opposition leader Jean-Claude Muyambo, whose prison sentence was extended from 26 months to five years. Regarding freedom of the media, the Government has authorized selected opposition-aligned media outlets to broadcast. However, more progress is required to achieve equal access to public media for all political parties.

IV. Good offices efforts in support of the implementation of the agreement

18. In support of the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement, my Deputy Special Representative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, David Gressly, continued to engage with relevant stakeholders, including national authorities, urging them to take concrete steps in the implementation of confidence-building measures, especially the release of political prisoners. He also called on the authorities to allow opposition parties and civil society groups to hold peaceful demonstrations, and encouraged them to instruct security forces to exercise restraint in the context of those demonstrations.

19. Regional actors have also remained engaged in efforts to implement the agreement. On 9 January, a senior adviser to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki, visited Kinshasa for consultations with President Kabila and key political figures from the Majorité présidentielle and the opposition.

20. Also on 9 January, the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, met in Brazzaville with a visiting delegation of the Episcopal Conference of the Congo to discuss progress in the implementation of the agreement. The delegation shared its views on the ongoing transition and on preparations for the holding of elections. It also urged President Sassou to remain engaged in efforts to find solutions to the political challenges facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

21. On 30 January, the Executive Secretary of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Stergomena Tax, visited Kinshasa and consulted with national stakeholders.

22. My Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Saïd Djinnit, has also continued his consultations with officials from the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and SADC on a visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo of representatives of these institutions in their capacity as the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, as decided during their meeting in Addis Ababa on 22 November 2017.

V. Observations

23. Thirteen months have passed since the signing of the 31 December 2016 agreement and, while the update of the voter register has reached its final stage and an electoral calendar has been issued, little has been done to implement the

confidence-building measures aimed at creating a conducive environment for peaceful and credible elections. I am concerned that this situation is fuelling renewed political instability, threatening the gains made in recent months and exacerbating an already difficult security, economic, human rights and humanitarian situation.

24. In recent weeks, amidst the continued deterioration of the political climate, the Catholic Church — a central institution in the lives of millions of Congolese — has regrettably been drawn into deep political divisions. The increasingly antagonistic rhetoric that has dominated public exchanges between the authorities and leaders of the Church is a matter of grave concern. It carries with it the risk of an ever more acrimonious and polarized public debate at a time when restraint and compromise are required for credible and fair elections to take place. Once again, I call on all stakeholders to work constructively towards a peaceful resolution of their differences, while keeping in mind that the full implementation of the 31 December agreement remains the only viable path out of the current political stalemate. I also stress that the security forces must respect the sanctity of all places of worship.

25. I commend the efforts made by the Independent National Electoral Commission to complete the update of the voter register. The successful conclusion of this process must now pave the way for the adoption by the March session of the Parliament of the law on the distribution of seats, which is an important requirement for the timely holding of the polls. Moving forward, it is imperative that all institutions, political actors and public figures who have a role to play in the holding of these elections exercise maturity, wisdom and responsibility, while encouraging their supporters to do the same. I further call on the authorities, political leaders on all sides, faith leaders and civil society groups to work together to create an environment conducive to the holding of credible and fair elections.

26. I welcome President Kabila's commitment, expressed at a press conference on 26 January in Kinshasa, to ensure that elections are held as planned. I also welcome his assurances that the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be respected. I take note of his call to Parliament to examine laws related to public demonstrations, with a view to improving them. I encourage members of Parliament to heed this call and take up this pressing issue during their March session, with the objective of opening democratic space.

27. Once again, I call on leaders of the opposition to join the political and electoral process to ensure that the voices they represent are heard and considered in the decision-making process. Today, as in the past, all political actors must realize that there is no alternative to participating in elections.

28. I am appalled by the deaths of at least 15 demonstrators, the injury of dozens and the arrest of hundreds during a series of protests in recent weeks. I once again urge the authorities to conduct credible investigations into the circumstances surrounding these deaths and bring those responsible to justice. I encourage them to work with all stakeholders to facilitate the holding of peaceful demonstrations and ensure freedom of expression for all Congolese citizens, as this is one of the foundations required for credible, free and fair elections. At the same time, I remind demonstrators, the opposition and civil society groups that they have an obligation to protest in a peaceful manner in conformity with the law. Similarly, the authorities must ensure that the security forces and civil authorities promote and protect the basic rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

29. I welcome the release of 25 political prisoners during the period under review, but I am gravely concerned that at least 90 political prisoners remain in detention. I call on the Government to fully implement the confidence-building measures stipulated in the 31 December agreement and halt arbitrary arrests and detentions.

30. I condemn the recent acts of intimidation by the security forces against MONUSCO personnel while they were monitoring demonstrations, particularly in Kinshasa. I would like to remind the Government of its responsibility to ensure their safety during the exercise of their duties.

31. Finally, I call on the international community and regional bodies, including the African Union, SADC, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States, to provide the necessary support to the timely holding of elections leading to a democratic transfer of power. I urge all stakeholders, from the region and beyond, to coordinate and intensify their efforts to help overcome the current political impasse and prepare the ground for credible elections, in line with the 31 December 2016 agreement and the legitimate aspirations of the Congolese people.

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**General Assembly
Seventy-second session
Agenda items 35 and 40****Security Council
Seventy-third year****Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their
implications for international peace, security
and development****The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan****Letter dated 15 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of
Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

This month marks the twenty-sixth anniversary of the heinous crime committed against the civilians and defenders of the town of Khojaly, in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. What happened in Khojaly in February 1992 was the largest massacre in the conflict.

Before the war, 7,000 people lived in that town. From October 1991, the town was entirely surrounded by the Armenian forces. In the night of 25 to 26 February 1992, following massive artillery bombardments, the assault on the town began from various directions. As a result of the attack and capture of the town, hundreds of Azerbaijanis, including women, children and the elderly, were killed, wounded or taken hostage, while the town was razed to the ground.

In 1993, the Security Council adopted four resolutions on the conflict, condemning the occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan and reaffirming respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, the inviolability of international borders and the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory. In response to Armenia's territorial claims and actions, the Council reconfirmed that the Nagorno-Karabakh region is an integral part of Azerbaijan and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from all the occupied territories.¹

In those resolutions, as well as in its presidential statements, the Security Council also expressed grave concern about "violations of ceasefire agreements which have caused heavy losses of human life and widespread material damage", "the displacement of a large number of civilians in Azerbaijan" and "the serious humanitarian emergency in the region", condemned the "attacks on civilians and bombardments of the territory of the Azerbaijani Republic" and reaffirmed that the

¹ Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993).



parties "are bound to comply with the principles and rules of international humanitarian law".

Other international organizations also strongly deplored the Armenian side for the use of military force and affirmed its direct responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the course of the war.

Thus, having considered the impact of the conflict on the civilian population in the area of combat operations, particularly the massacre in the town of Khojaly in February 1992, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in a declaration dated 11 March 1992, expressed deep concern "about recent reports of indiscriminate killings and outrages", firmly condemned "the violence and attacks directed against the civilian populations in the Nagorno-Karabakh area of the Azerbaijan Republic" and underlined that "no solution imposed by force can be accepted by the international community".²

In 1993, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Margaretha af Ugglas, in her capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the Council of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, underlined that the acquisition of territory by force can never be condoned or accepted as a basis for territorial claims³ and expressed grave concern at the unacceptable scorched-earth policy practised by the Armenian armed forces.⁴

In its resolution 1416 (2005) of 25 January 2005, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe noted particularly that "considerable parts of the territory of Azerbaijan are still occupied by Armenian forces" and that "the military action, and the widespread ethnic hostilities which preceded it, led to large-scale ethnic expulsion and the creation of mono-ethnic areas which resemble the terrible concept of ethnic cleansing".⁵

Referring to the reports of independent sources, the European Court of Human Rights pointed out that "at the time of the capture of Khojaly on the night of 25 to 26 February 1992 hundreds of civilians of Azerbaijani ethnic origin were reportedly killed, wounded or taken hostage, during their attempt to flee the captured town, by Armenian fighters attacking the town". The Court qualified atrocities committed in Khojaly as "acts of particular gravity which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity".⁶

There are abundant sources, consisting of the testimonies of witnesses to the tragedy, statements by authoritative international institutions and the findings of independent investigations by foreign journalists, human rights activists and

² Declaration adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 11 March 1992 at the 471bis meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.

³ Council of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Communication No. 284, Prague, 26 October 1993.

⁴ Council of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Communication No. 301, Prague, 19 November 1993.

⁵ Resolution 1416 (2005) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, entitled "The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference", 25 January 2005.

⁶ Judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, 22 April 2010, para. 87.

authoritative international non-governmental organizations, which contribute to corroborating the facts on the ground.⁷

Thus, based on the results of their inquiries, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki and the Memorial Human Rights Centre placed direct responsibility for the civilian deaths with the Armenian forces.

In her letter dated 24 March 1997 addressed to the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki responded as follows to attempts by Armenian propaganda to obfuscate this human rights organization with fabrications:

Our research and that of the Memorial Human Rights Centre found that the retreating militia fled Khojaly along with some of the large groups of fleeing civilians. Our report noted that by remaining armed and in uniform, the Azerbaijani militia may be considered as combatants and thus endangered fleeing civilians, even if their intent had been to protect them. *Yet we place direct responsibility for the civilian deaths with Karabakh Armenian forces. Indeed, neither our report nor that of [the Centre] includes any evidence to support the argument that Azerbaijani forces obstructed the flight of, or fired on Azeri civilians.*⁸

According to the Memorial Human Rights Centre, "there was mass violence upon the civilians of Khojaly during the military operation to take this town"; "the mass murder of civilians in the 'free corridor' zone and adjacent territory cannot be justified under any circumstances"; "the civilians remaining in Khojaly after it was taken by Armenian detachments were deported"; "these actions were carried out in an organized manner"; "there was violent treatment of the detained inhabitants of Khojaly". The Centre concludes its investigation by stating that "the actions by the Armenian units of Nagorno Karabakh towards the civilians of Khojaly during the assault on the town are a gross violation of the Geneva Convention and also of the ... Universal Declaration of Human Rights".⁹

Furthermore, public statements by Armenian officials and the leaders of the subordinate separatist regime that Armenia established in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan are undoubtedly regarded as an admission of liability.

The following words of the incumbent President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, who served as senior commander of the illegal armed groups, which directly participated in the seizure of Khojaly and mass killings of its inhabitants, speak for themselves and disprove any denial of responsibility for the crimes committed by the Armenian side in the town: "Before Khojali, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that [stereotype]. And that's what happened."¹⁰

⁷ For more information, see www.justiceforkhojaly.org and Fiona MacLachlan and Ian Peart, eds., *Khojaly Witness of a War Crime: Armenia in the Dock* (Reading, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ithaca Press, 2014).

⁸ Emphasis added. The full text of the letter is available at www.hrw.org/legacy/english/docs/1997/03/24/azerba16933.htm.

⁹ Report by the Memorial Human Rights Centre on massive violations of human rights committed in the seizure of Khojaly during the night of 25 to 26 February 1992; see also MacLachlan and Peart (eds.), *Khojaly Witness of a War Crime*.

¹⁰ See Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York and London, New York University Press, 2003).

In his article, Jirair Libaridian, who was chief advisor to the first President of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrossian, at the time of the Khojaly massacre, admitted that "it is very difficult for an Armenian to write about Khojaly" because "something unacceptable did happen, something that involved killings and mutilation of Azeri civilians by Armenian forces in Karabakh".¹¹

According to another Armenian author, Markar Melkonian, in his book dedicated to his brother, the well-known international terrorist Monte Melkonian, who personally took part in the assault on Khojaly, the town "had been a strategic goal, but it had also been an act of revenge". Melkonian particularly mentions the role of the fighters of the two Armenian military detachments Arabo and Aramo and describes in detail how they butchered the peaceful inhabitants of Khojaly. Thus, as he puts it, some inhabitants of the town had almost made it to safety, after fleeing for nearly six miles, when "[Armenian] soldiers had chased them down". The soldiers, in his words, "unsheathed the knives they had carried on their hips for so long, and began stabbing".¹²

The crimes committed in Khojaly were not an isolated or sporadic act, but an integral part of Armenia's widespread and systematic policy and practice of carrying out atrocities.

As one author has observed, "a key component of the Karabakh insurgency's strategy was the cleansing of Azeri civilians from towns and villages inside Nagorno-Karabakh and in the territories separating Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia". In order to achieve that objective, "major Azeri towns in the region ... were looted, burned, and 'systematically levelled so that only foundations remain' and their Azeri populations were forcibly expelled". The author further notes that "one of the most vicious expulsions took place during an attack on Khojaly in February 1992", where Armenian forces killed hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians, "many of whom were unarmed and were killed while fleeing across open territory".¹³

In his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Secretary-General notes in particular that "fundamental to enhancing respect for international law is the need to ensure accountability for violations", which is "crucial to provide redress for victims, deter further violations and promote peace and reconciliation" (see S/2017/414, paras. 33 and 70).

Unfortunately, the perpetrators of the crimes committed in Khojaly and elsewhere in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan continue to enjoy impunity. The position of the Republic of Azerbaijan in that regard is clear. The establishment of truth with respect to gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law committed during the conflict, the provision of adequate and effective reparations to victims and the need for institutional actions to prevent the repetition of such violations are among the necessary prerequisites for sustainable peace and long-term stability.

It is therefore important that peace efforts, including those being undertaken towards the resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, do not encourage, accept or tolerate the situations achieved by the unlawful use of force and

¹¹ Jirair Libaridian, "An Armenian Perspective on Khojaly", 19 February 2014.

¹² Markar Melkonian, *My Brother's Road: An American's Fateful Journey to Armenia* (London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2005).

¹³ See Jessica A. Stanton, *Violence and Restraint in Civil War: Civilian Targeting in the Shadow of International Law* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016).

other egregious violations of international law, such as war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 35 and 40, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Yashar Aliyev
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

**Security Council**

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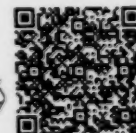
Letter dated 16 February 2018 from the Permanent Representatives of Liechtenstein and Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

We are writing regarding the Security Council ministerial briefing on "Maintenance of international peace and security: the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations" scheduled for 21 February 2018. Liechtenstein and Switzerland welcome this opportunity to reflect on the Council's performance in implementing the important mandate that it discharges on behalf of the entire United Nations membership, in accordance with the Charter. More regular discussions of this nature in the Council, open to all States, would help to strengthen the accountability of the Council and enhance the legitimacy of its work.

At a time when the world is in dire need of committed multilateral leadership to tackle a growing list of complex security challenges, the Security Council continues to experience difficulty in living up to its responsibilities under the Charter. In particular, the Council has repeatedly failed to take meaningful action to prevent or end atrocity crimes, including in a number of ongoing crisis situations. Permanent members continue to use their veto in a manner that is inconsistent with their responsibilities under the Charter and with international law.

In this respect, we would like to remind Security Council members that 115 States have endorsed the Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, as elaborated by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group. By signing the Code of Conduct, these 115 States have committed to timely and decisive action by the Council aimed at preventing or ending atrocity crimes, including by not voting against credible draft resolutions to the same end. The call for preventive action contained in the Code of Conduct aims at averting atrocities before they occur and is fully in line with the Secretary-General's agenda. Of the current States members of the Council, nine are signatories to the Code of Conduct — a procedural majority that allows the Council to address any situation falling under the Code of Conduct in a preventive manner.

States Members of the United Nations see the Security Council as a guardian of the purposes and principles of the Charter and a guarantor of the rule of law at the international level. A cardinal purpose of the Charter is the suppression of acts of aggression. In this respect, the Council will soon have a new tool at its disposal: the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression, which will take legal effect on 17 July 2018, complementing the prohibition of the illegal use of force enshrined in Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter. If incorporated diligently into the Council's toolbox, the Council's power to refer to the International Criminal



Court matters relating to the crime of aggression will have tremendous potential to deter the illegal use of force in future.

We would be grateful if you could circulate the present letter as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Christian **Wenaweser**
Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein

(Signed) Jürg **Lauber**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland



Security Council

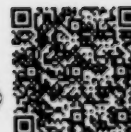
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Letter dated 16 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information bulletins from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic for the period 13–16 February 2018 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) V. Nebenzia



Annex to the letter dated 16 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (13 February 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported seven incidents of gunfire: four in Ladhqiyyah Governorate and three in Aleppo Governorate.

The Turkish representative office has reported three incidents of gunfire: two in Damascus Governorate and one in Idlib Governorate.

Most of the incidents of mortars and small arms being fired indiscriminately have been reported in areas controlled by fighters of the Nusrah Front terrorist group.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has not carried out any humanitarian operations over the past 24 hours.

In total, 1,750 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,450.7 tons.

The safe passage of one United Nations humanitarian convoy was assured to Tall Shihab in Dar'a Governorate. The total weight of cargo delivered was 130 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 43 persons.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 70,403 persons.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed with populated areas over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process remains unchanged at 2,357.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (14 February 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported nine incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: three in Aleppo, three in Ladhqiyyah, two in Homs and one in Damascus.

The Turkish representative office has reported four incidents of gunfire: two in Damascus Governorate and two in Idlib Governorate.

Most of the incidents of mortars and small arms being fired indiscriminately have been reported in areas controlled by fighters of the Nusrah Front terrorist group.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has carried out two humanitarian operations: 1.1 tons of food were delivered to residents in Hama city; and 1.9 tons of food were delivered to the local population of Rasm al-Falih in Aleppo Governorate.

In total, 1,752 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,453.7 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 169 persons.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 70,572 persons.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

Over the past 24 hours one ceasefire agreement has been signed with Abu Jalus in Aleppo Governorate.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process has increased to 2,358.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (15 February 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported seven incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: five in Ladhqiyyah, one in Aleppo and one in Damascus.

The Turkish representative office has reported four incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: two in Damascus, one in Hama and one in Idlib.

Most of the incidents of mortars and small arms being fired indiscriminately have been reported in areas controlled by fighters of the Nusrah Front terrorist group.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has not carried out any humanitarian operations over the past 24 hours.

In total, 1,752 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,453.7 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 31 persons.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 70,603 persons.

The safe passage of one United Nations humanitarian convoy was assured to Nashabiyah in Damascus Governorate and to Tall Shihab in Dar'a Governorate. The total weight of cargo delivered was 179 tons.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

Over the past 24 hours one ceasefire agreement has been signed with Bayt al-Rafi'ah in Homs Governorate.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process has increased to 2,359.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (16 February 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported three incidents of gunfire: two in Ladhqiyyah Governorate and one in Aleppo Governorate.

The Turkish representative office has reported four violations: two in Damascus Governorate and two in Idlib Governorate.

Most of the incidents of mortars and small arms being fired indiscriminately have been reported in areas controlled by fighters of the Nusra Front terrorist group.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has carried out one humanitarian operation in Kawm Muhayris, Qunaytirah Governorate: 1.9 tons of food were delivered to the local population.

In total, 1,753 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,455.6 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 150 persons.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 70,753.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

Over the past 24 hours two ceasefire agreements have been signed with Rasha al-Qibliyah and Hamdaniyah in Idlib Governorate.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process has increased to 2,361.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
19 February 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 16 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On 20 February 2018, Mahmoud Abbas, the Chair of the Palestinian Authority, is set to address the Security Council. As he often does in such international forums, Mr. Abbas is sure to speak of his commitment to dialogue and reconciliation. This is not the message the Chairman portrays when speaking to his own people and to Arab-language audiences.

Just this past January, in an address to the Palestine Liberation Organization Central Council, Mr. Abbas said that Israel "is a colonialist project that has no connection to Judaism" (see annex I, note 1). He then went on to say that the millennia-old yearning of the Jewish people to return to their homeland was nothing more than "slogans [that] were invented for them and they were brought here". In the same speech, Mr. Abbas also made the nefarious accusation that Zionist leaders advocated for anti-Semitism as the "engine of Zionism".

These sorts of hateful statements by Mr. Abbas are unfortunately not new. In September 2015, as part of his quest to delegitimize the connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, Mr. Abbas said that Jews had no rights to the Temple Mount and other holy sites, and that "they have no right to desecrate them with their filthy feet" (see annex I, note 2). He then went on to incite violence, saying that "we welcome every drop of blood spilled in Jerusalem".

Unfortunately, the incitement to violence espoused by Mr. Abbas does not end with dangerous words. The Chair of the Palestinian Authority has made it his official policy to glorify terrorists and incentivize murder, all in the apparent hope of prolonging the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and, in doing so, avoiding genuine direct negotiations. Palestinian towns and cities are filled with public squares, schools and community centres named for terrorists such as Dalal Mughrabi, a woman who massacred 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children, in 1978. On occasions when terrorists are released from prison, Mr. Abbas and other Palestinian Authority leaders hold celebratory ceremonies in honour of these convicted murderers (see annex I, note 3).

Most egregiously, despite the warnings and pleading of some in the international community, the Palestinian Authority's official policy of "pay to slay" continues unabated. In 2017, the Palestinian Authority dedicated \$153 million to paying imprisoned and released terrorists, and another \$191 million in allowances to the families of so-called martyrs. Altogether, the Palestinian Authority paid \$344 million directly in support of terrorists. This equals about 7 per cent of the Palestinian



Authority's budget, and is almost 50 per cent of the foreign aid generously donated by the international community.

Even as Mr. Abbas continues to avoid negotiations with Israel, he has sought to embrace the internationally recognized terrorists of Hamas without demanding that they renounce violence as mandated by the United Nations and the international community. In his dealings with Hamas, Mr. Abbas has not even insisted that the terrorists honour international law and basic human morality and immediately return the Israeli civilians and the remains of Israel Defense Force soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul that they are savagely holding hostage.

A comprehensive list of some of Mr. Abbas's most hate-filled statements over the years is detailed in annex I to the present letter. Similarly, we have included documentation portraying repeated instances when Mr. Abbas and Palestinian Authority officials encouraged, and even celebrated, terror against innocent Israelis (see annex II).

It is our sincere hope that the day will soon come when Palestinian leadership will emerge which prioritizes educating towards tolerance and dialogue over hate and violence. We eagerly await this moment, which is sure to bring about the hope for a better future for Israelis and Palestinians.

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter distributed as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Danny **Danon**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex I to the letter dated 16 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Notes

1. 14 January 2018: In a speech to the Palestinian Liberation Organization Central Council, Mr. Abbas said:

Egyptian intellectual Abd Al-Wahab Al-Masri, may his memory be a blessing, was one of the most important people that spoke about the Zionist and Jewish movement.... He described this entity with these words: "The significance of Israel's functional character is that colonialism created it in order to fill a specific role; it is a colonialist project that is not connected to Judaism, but made use of the Jews so they would serve as pawns, and they were, under the motto 'the Promised Land' and 'the Beloved Land', and they brought them here".

There is an important matter: how will the Jews immigrate [to Palestine]? The Jews do not want to immigrate because of killing and slaughter. Even during the Holocaust that took place they did not immigrate [to Palestine] (*sic.*; there were many attempts to immigrate to the Land of Israel, many of which were blocked by the British). By the way, the number of Jews in Palestine in 1948 did not exceed 640,000 (*sic.*; according to Israeli government statistics, the Jewish population in 1948 was 660,920), and most of them came from Europe. [Theodor] Herzl [a founder of modern Zionism] used to say: "Antisemitism is the engine of Zionism". In other words, the more anti-Semitic a person is, the more beneficial he is to us [the Jews]. This is because he advances the Zionist goal: to expel the Jews from their countries to Palestine.

2. 16 September 2015: Mr. Abbas was interviewed about the violent riots on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and said:

We bless you; we bless the Mourabitoun and the Mourabitat. We welcome every drop of blood spilled in Jerusalem. This is pure blood, clean blood, blood on its way to Allah. With the help of Allah, every *shaheed* (martyr) will be in heaven, and every wounded will get his reward.... All of their steps, we will not allow them. All these divisions, Al-Aqsa is ours, and the (Church of the) Holy Sepulcher is ours, everything is ours, all ours. They (the Jews) have no right to desecrate them with their filthy feet and we won't allow them to.

3. 14 August 2013: Mr. Abbas greeted 11 released terrorists at his presidential compound in Ramallah. All 11 had been serving jail terms for involvement in the killings of Israelis, and several had been jailed for murder.

Annex II to the letter dated 16 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

1. 3 February 2018: Mr. Abbas hosted the families of 11 terrorists in Ramallah in a meeting broadcast by the official Palestinian news agency. At the meeting, Mr. Abbas told the families that "[their] sons are martyrs". Among those in attendance were the family of Baha Alian, the murderer of three Israelis on a bus in Jerusalem's Armon Hanetziv neighbourhood in October 2017, and the family of Alaa Abu Jabal, who drove his car into Israeli pedestrians and stabbed the victims in October 2017.
2. 25 December 2017: Mr Abbas meets with Rafat Jawabra, commander of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a known terrorist organization, in his office. Jawabra had just recently finished a 15-year prison sentence for plotting a suicide bombing against Israel in 2002.
3. 29 November 2014: While speaking to the Arab League in Cairo, Mr. Abbas accuses Israel of establishing an apartheid government and said: "We will never recognize the Jewishness of the state of Israel."
4. 21 January 2013: In an interview with Al-Mayadeen, a television station in Beirut, Mr. Abbas said that he "challenges anyone who can deny that the Zionist movement had ties with the Nazis before World War II" and that he has "70 more books that [he] still [hasn't] published" on the "collaboration" between Zionists and Nazis.

**Security Council**

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Note by the Secretary-General concerning the date of an election to fill a vacancy in the International Court of Justice

1. By a letter dated 6 February 2018, Judge Hisashi Owada (Japan) informed the President of the Court, pursuant to Article 13, paragraph 4 of the Statute of the Court, of his resignation as a Member of the Court, effective 7 June 2018. A copy of Judge Owada's letter was forwarded to the Secretary-General by the President of the Court under the cover of a letter dated 6 February 2018. Therefore, a vacancy in the Court will occur on 7 June 2018, to be filled by election in accordance with the provisions of the Statute of the Court.

2. Article 14 of the Statute of the Court provides that:

Vacancies [that occur in the case of the resignation of the member of the Court] shall be filled by the same method as that laid down for the first election subject to the following provision: the Secretary-General shall, within one month of the occurrence of the vacancy, proceed to issue the invitations provided for in Article 5, and the date of the election shall be fixed by the Security-Council.

3. Article 5, paragraph 1, of the Statute further provides:

At least three months before the date of the election, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall address a written request to the members of the Permanent Court of Arbitration belonging to the States which are parties to the present Statute, and to the members of the national groups appointed under Article 4, paragraph 2, inviting them to undertake, within a given time, by national groups, the nomination of persons in a position to accept the duties of a member of the Court.

4. In view of the fact that the date of the election is to be fixed by the Security Council, it is suggested that the Council might wish to consider this question at an early meeting, taking into consideration that the Secretary-General's call for nominations must be dispatched at least three months before the date of the election. The Secretary-General expects to issue the respective written communications as soon as possible.

5. The Security Council and the General Assembly will hold elections concurrently on the date fixed by the Security Council. The term of the newly elected Judge will commence on the date that the individual is elected by both bodies. In accordance with Article 15 of the Statute of the Court, the newly elected member of the Court will hold the office for the remainder of the predecessor's term, expiring on 5 February 2021.





Security Council

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19 February 2018

Original: English

Identical letters dated 19 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to submit herewith a table clarifying the number of civilians killed and injured as a result of rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells launched by armed terrorist groups against safe neighbourhoods in Damascus during the period from 22 January to 12 February 2018. These terrorist attacks have killed 44 civilians and wounded 158 others, mostly women and children, as well as causing serious damage to public and private property and infrastructure.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells launched</i>	<i>Number of civilians killed</i>	<i>Number of civilians injured</i>
22 January 2018	178	12	23
23 January 2018	3	–	–
24 January 2018	5	–	–
25 January 2018	4	2	3
26 January 2018	5	–	–
27 January 2018	1	–	1
28 January 2018	3	–	–
29 January 2018	15	–	12
30 January 2018	42	–	9
31 January 2018	13	1	–
1 February 2018	92	11	15
2 February 2018	101	–	2
3 February 2018	2	–	–
4 February 2018	10	–	11
5 February 2018	73	2	14
6 February 2018	62	4	23
7 February 2018	81	2	11
8 February 2018	82	3	11
9 February 2018	65	4	14
10 February 2018	27	–	4



<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells launched</i>	<i>Number of civilians killed</i>	<i>Number of civilians injured</i>
11 February 2018	20	3	5
12 February 2018	11	—	—
Total	895	44	158

It would be highly appreciated if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Bashar Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
22 February 2018

Original: English

Identical letters dated 20 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Following the identical letters that I sent on 19 February 2018, and upon instruction from my Government, I have the honour to convey the information attached herewith regarding the terrorist attacks that armed terrorist groups started to launch in the early hours of 20 February against safe neighbourhoods and suburbs of Damascus. The terrorist armed groups targeted these safe neighbourhoods with more than 45 rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells, which have killed six civilians and wounded more than 29, most of whom are women and children, as well as caused serious damage to public and private property and infrastructure. I assure you that these figures are still preliminary, as hospitals continue to receive many patients in critical condition, while the city and its suburbs continue to be targeted by rocket-propelled grenades launched by those terrorist armed groups.

It would be highly appreciated if the present letter and its annex were circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Bashar Ja'afari
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the identical letters dated 20 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

[Original: Arabic]

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the following urgent information.

On Tuesday, 20 February 2018, armed terrorist groups fired dozens of deadly projectiles from their positions in eastern Ghutah at the city of Damascus and Rif Dimashq. At the time of writing, those projectiles have killed and injured dozens of innocent civilians. This killing machine has not spared a single street of Damascus, nor any of the capital city's residential neighbourhoods, schools, hospitals, clinics, public service facilities, houses of worship and diplomatic missions.

This dangerous escalation by the armed terrorist groups in eastern Ghutah and the firing of more than 45 rocket-propelled projectiles at Damascus in a few hours is in line with the daily attacks those groups have perpetrated against the population of Damascus using rocket-propelled projectiles and mortar shells. More than 1,500 such projectiles were fired over the past seven weeks, killing and injuring hundreds of innocent civilians, most of whom were children and women.

The terrorist attacks coincided and were carried out in coordination with the defamatory media campaigns that are being waged by certain Western and other officials. The aim of those campaigns is to provide direct support and cover for the terrorists and to encourage them to commit more acts of terrorism and kill without fear of being held accountable. Such conduct proves yet again that government officials of certain Member States are complicit in the crimes that the terrorists have committed against innocent civilians in Damascus and Rif Dimashq. Moreover, those officials would deny the Syrian State the right to defend its citizens, combat terrorism and stand up to those who perpetrate and fund terrorism and provide arms to terrorists. The foregoing is part of the despicable, ongoing plot that they laid some seven years ago. In that time, the terrorists have carried out bombings and committed massacres throughout Syria at the behest of their leaders and controllers in the capitals of certain well-known Western and Arab Gulf countries.

The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms that these terrorist attacks will not deter it from continuing to combat terrorism, striving to restore security and stability to the Syrian people, and rebuilding what the terrorists and their partners, financiers and supporters have destroyed.

The Syrian Arab Republic calls upon the Security Council and the Secretary-General to condemn immediately and forcefully this terrorist aggression, which has been directed, in particular, at the capital, Damascus, and its defenceless population. Moreover, it urges the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility to maintain international peace and security by taking preventive and punitive measures against those regimes and governments that support and fund terrorism, with a view to implementing the relevant resolutions of the Council, including resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015), 2253 (2015) and 2368 (2017).

The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms that if certain Western States members of the Security Council were to prevent the Council from condemning these terrorist crimes, it would send a message to the terrorists and the regimes that support them that they can continue to commit acts of terrorism and crimes against the Syrian people. It would also say to the terrorist organizations that they can continue to hold hostage to terrorism the people of eastern Ghutah and other parts of the country and

to besiege them from within and use them as human shields, in order to serve the interests of those organizations and their supporters.

I should be grateful if these identical letters could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
21 February 2018

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Mali*Summary*

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the second report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Mali to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. It contains information on the situation of children affected by armed conflict in Mali during the period from 1 January 2014 to 30 June 2017.

The report focuses on the northern and central regions of Mali and highlights grave violations against children committed by parties to the conflict. It highlights the trends and patterns of the six grave violations committed against children and contains information, where available, on the perpetrators. The progress made by parties to the conflict in terms of dialogue, action plans and other child protection commitments is also outlined. The report contains a series of recommendations aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in Mali.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions, is the second report of the Secretary-General on children and conflict in Mali to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. It covers the period from 1 January 2014 to 30 June 2017 and describes trends and patterns of grave violations against children in Mali that have occurred since my previous report (S/2014/267), and the progress made in ending and preventing such violations, in follow-up to the recommendations contained in my previous report and the conclusions on children and armed conflict in Mali of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2014/2).

2. During the reporting period, the country task force on monitoring and reporting documented grave violations against children perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, including armed groups that have emerged since my previous report in 2014. In the annexes to my most recent annual report on children and armed conflict (A/72/361-S/2017/821), Ansar Eddine, the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) and the Mouvement pour l'unification et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) were listed for the recruitment and use of children as well as rape and other forms of sexual violence against children. MNLA is listed as a party that has put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children.

3. During the reporting period, the country task force on monitoring and reporting was able to verify only approximately half of the reported grave violations, owing to a combination of limited human resources capacity on the part of child protection actors and insecurity and access restrictions in northern Mali. Therefore, it is estimated that the violations committed against children are much higher than reflected in the present report. Nevertheless, the data presented provide an indication of some important trends and the ways in which the conflict continues to have a negative impact on children in Mali. Grave violations against children were widespread in northern Mali, in particular throughout 2016.

II. Overview of political and security developments

4. The reporting period witnessed major political and security developments, including the signing of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali between the Government of Mali and some armed groups, also referred to as signatory armed groups, in May and June 2015; a deadly attack in Gao in January 2017, which killed 54 members of the Operational Coordination Mechanism;¹ and the launch of mixed patrols² in Gao in February 2017. Furthermore, in March 2017 the conférence d'entente nationale was held and interim authorities were installed in the Gao, Ménaka, Kidal, Timbuktu and Taoudenni regions between February and April 2017. However, the reporting period was marked by frequent tensions, sometimes escalating to ceasefire violations and armed confrontations, between the two existing coalitions of armed groups: the Platform coalition of armed groups (Platform) and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA). There was also an increase in

¹ Composed of members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces, the Platform coalition of armed groups and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and responsible for the progressive redeployment of Malian Defence and Security Forces in northern Mali and the coordination of mixed patrols and for securing cantonment sites and protecting interim authorities

² Composed of members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces, the Platform coalition of armed groups and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad

extreme violence in northern Mali, as well as in the previously peaceful central regions of Mopti and Ségou.

5. An initial cycle of peace negotiations started in Algiers between the armed groups and the Government of Mali in July 2014. After five rounds of negotiations, on 15 May 2015, the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was signed in Bamako by the Government of Mali, the Platform and two representatives of CMA, namely the Coalition du peuple de l'Azawad (CPA) and the Coordination des mouvements et fronts patriotiques de résistance II (CMFPR-II). The other CMA members, namely MNLA, the Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA) and one faction of the Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA), followed with their signatures on 20 June 2015. A monitoring structure, the Comité de suivi de l'Accord, and its technical bodies were established and have been operational since that date.

6. Owing to a continuing lack of trust between the signatory parties, persistent insecurity and the absence of infrastructure and resources, there were significant gaps in State authority in rural areas of the northern regions. Some improvements, however, were observed in 2017, when the signatory parties took steps to address that situation by establishing interim authorities in the Gao, Ménaka, Kidal, Timbuktu and Taoudenni regions.

7. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme called for in the peace agreement had not yet begun at the time of writing. However, since 31 October 2016, eight cantonment sites have been ready to accommodate 12,000 combatants, including adult women combatants and children associated with armed groups. The first Operational Coordination Mechanism mixed patrols were launched in Gao on 23 February 2017. Subsequently, the conférence d'entente nationale, tasked with the drafting of a national charter for peace, unity and reconciliation, met in Bamako on 27 March 2017 with the participation of the signatory armed groups, civil society and women and youth groups.

8. The reporting period was also dominated by growing insecurity, particularly in the northern and central regions, as a result of clashes between violent extremist groups and the Malian Defence and Security Forces, confrontations between signatory armed groups, a marked increase in tactics of extreme violence perpetrated by some armed groups, acts of intimidation, banditry and the targeted assassinations of community and administrative representatives and teachers. Those developments led to civilian casualties and a mass displacement of population, both of which affected children, and also led to a negative impact on humanitarian access to and activities in those regions.

9. The number of internally displaced persons in Mali decreased from 254,822 in 2014 to 36,690 in 2016. However, according to the Direction nationale du développement social of Mali and the International Organization for Migration, as at 30 June 2017 the number of internally displaced persons had increased to 51,961, 53 per cent of them children. In addition, the number of children affected by the humanitarian crisis continued to grow, from 791,000 in 2014 to 1,675,000 in 2016. As of June 2017, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), of 3.7 million people estimated to be affected, about 2,072,000 were children (56 per cent).

10. In a positive development, following the public announcement by CMA in February 2016 of a commitment to end child recruitment and use, on 5 March 2017 the coalition signed an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children. The action plan is binding on all armed groups that constitute CMA, including MNLA, which has been listed in the annexes of my annual report on children and armed conflict since 2012.

11. The French military operation Serval/Barkhane gradually drew down and reconfigured itself in August 2014. In addition, the absence of control by signatory armed groups over some of the areas in which they operated led to a substantial increase in the activities of groups using tactics of extreme violence, such as Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), MUJAO and Al Mourabitoun, who targeted the Malian Defence and Security Forces, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the French military operation as well as civilians. Armed attacks became more sophisticated and increasingly frequent and well-coordinated, employing tactics such as vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, remote-controlled explosive devices and indirect fire. From 2015 to 2016, the number of attacks claimed by groups using tactics of extreme violence against Malian, French and MINUSMA forces and against the signatory armed groups tripled, increasing from 28 in 2015 to 85 in 2016. The trend continued in the first half of 2017. Civilians were also increasingly targeted. On 2 March 2017, Ansar Eddine, the Front de libération du Macina (FLM), Al Mourabitoun and AQIM announced, on social media, a joint alliance named the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, led by Iyad ag Ghali, the leader of Ansar Eddine. The new group remains within the network of Al-Qaida-linked actors in the subregion.

12. Also of note is that fact that, since the beginning of 2015, the formerly peaceful regions of Ségou and Mopti, in central Mali, and the regions along the borders with Burkina Faso and Mauritania have also become areas of increased activity by armed groups. Killings, acts of intimidation and the preaching of violent ideologies in the Mopti region have resulted in the displacement of populations and prompted local administration officials, including teachers, to leave.

III. Parties to the conflict in Mali

13. Since my previous report, numerous armed groups and splinter armed groups have emerged. The signatory armed groups have formed two coalitions: CMA and the Platform.

A. The Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and its splinter groups

14. CMA was created in June 2014 by MNLA, HCUA and the MAA faction led by Sidi Ibrahim Ould Sidati (MAA-CMA) when the three groups issued its "Algiers declaration", in which they called for the autonomy of the Azawad region. The three movements rejected the first signing of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in May 2015, but finally signed in June 2015.

15. MAA was created through the merging of the Front national de libération de l'Azawad and MUJAO at the beginning of 2013. In September 2013, MAA split into two factions. The faction led by Sidi Ibrahim Ould Sidati created CMA, while the other faction led by Ahmed Ould Sidi Mohamed created the Platform (see para. 19).

16. CPA was created in March 2014 and joined CMA in September 2014. CPA was one of the two armed groups from CMA that had signed the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali in May 2015 on behalf of CMA. That signing was allegedly done without prior approval by the CMA leadership and was therefore rejected by CMA. As a consequence, CPA splintered into two factions, one of which remained in CMA.

17. CMFPR-II was created in April 2014, when it emerged as a splinter group from the Coordination des mouvements et forces patriotiques de résistance (CMFPR-I) and

joined CMA. Together with CPA, CMFPR-II was excluded from CMA after signing the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali in May 2015 on behalf of CMA, without prior approval from the CMA leadership.

B. The Platform coalition of armed groups and its splinter groups

18. In June 2014, armed movements signed a declaration in which they pledged to create a unified Malian State. On 15 May 2015, the Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés (GATIA), CMFPR-I and the MAA faction under the leadership of Ahmed Ould Sidi Mohamed (MAA-Platform) signed the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation on behalf of the Platform.

19. MAA-Platform, led by Ahmed Ould Sidi Mohamed, was formed by Arab elements from the Lamhar clan along with some Timbuktu Bérabiche clans following the September 2013 split of MAA into two factions (see para. 15).

20. CMFPR-I, composed of community-based militias such as the Ganda Koy, Ganda Izo and Ganda Lassal Izo, created the Platform with the other armed groups in June 2014. GATIA, originally a self-defence group, joined the Platform in August 2014.

21. The Mouvement populaire pour le salut de l'Azawad was created as a splinter group of MAA-CMA in August 2014. It joined the Platform in February 2016 but later disassociated itself from the group. The Front populaire de l'Azawad was founded in September 2012 and was part of CMA. It left CMA in November 2014 and joined the Platform in March 2016, but it also later disassociated itself from the Platform. The Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad (MSA) emerged as a splinter group from CMA in September 2016 and formed an alliance with GATIA.

IV. Grave violations against children

22. Throughout the reporting period, grave violations against children were prominent in northern Mali as well as in the previously peaceful central regions of Mopti and Ségou. Children were directly or indirectly affected by the protracted conflict in multiple ways. The United Nations received 1,322 allegations of grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict. Of the total incidents documented, the country task force on monitoring and reporting was able to verify 740 cases affecting 507 children. The monitoring and reporting as well as the verification of grave violations against children was hampered by restrictions to movement, a lack of access to conflict-affected areas and the mobility of some of the armed groups and by the limited staffing of the MINUSMA Child Protection Unit and the insufficient presence of child protection actors in the field. Data in the present report therefore do not represent the full extent of violations but is rather indicative of the impact of the armed conflict on children.

23. During the period under review, parties to the conflict responsible for grave violations against children included CMA and the Platform and, to a lesser extent, MUJAO, Al Mourabitoun, Ansar Eddine, FLM and the Malian armed forces. However, in many cases it was not possible to attribute responsibility to a particular party to the conflict. The most common violation against children was their recruitment and use, which reached its peak in 2016. All other grave violations continued to be recorded. Although the number of verified incidents of rape and sexual violence decreased throughout the period, the violation was estimated to be highly underreported. The number of attacks on schools and related protected personnel increased throughout the period under review. That, combined with threats

of attacks and general insecurity, severely hindered children's access to education. The safe access of humanitarian actors to populations, including children, affected by the conflict, as well as the detention of children for their association with armed groups, remained an issue of great concern.

A. Recruitment and use of children

24. While the United Nations received 748 allegations of recruitment and use by parties to the conflict, verification was only possible for cases involving 284 children, including 16 girls, from 13 to 17 years of age. It was not always possible to establish responsibility, but all cases were attributed to armed groups. In 2014, cases involving 103 children were verified and attributed to CMA (MNLA, HCUA and MAA-CMA) and the Platform (MAA-Platform and GATIA); an increase in cases was documented in 2015 (167) and 2016 (454), of which only 84 and 79 cases, respectively, of recruitment and use were verified. In the first half of 2017, 24 allegations were received and 18 boys were verified as recruited by the Platform, CMA and unidentified groups.

25. Of the 284 verified cases of the recruitment and use of children, at least 133 were attributed to the Platform, 114 to CMA, 6 to MUJAO, 3 to Al Mourabitoun, 1 to Ansar Eddine and 27 to unidentified perpetrators. Children were used as combatants and reportedly engaged in hostilities, but were also used as cooks and to serve at checkpoints.

26. Only a few cases involving girls, 16 in total, were verified during the period under review. Two girls were recruited by MSA in 2015 and 14 by the Platform in 2016. As verified during the reported period, all girls were used as cooks and to fetch firewood. However, more girls were suspected to have been recruited and used by armed groups. A gender-sensitive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process and increased access to services and programmes for survivors of sexual violence are expected to create opportunities to better identify more girls associated with armed groups.

27. The peak in 2016 of reports of child recruitment and use is considered the result of armed groups' interest in inflating the numbers of their combatants because of the prospect of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration dividends. It is also believed that misinformation about the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process led to an increase in children joining armed groups in the hopes of benefitting from the adult disarmament, demobilization and reintegration package. During the pre-cantonment exercises for signatory armed groups that took place in Gao in December 2016 and January 2017, 10 children were identified during the screening and registration of combatants. At the time of writing, advocacy was under way for their transfer to child protection partners.

Deprivation of liberty of children for alleged association with armed groups

28. As stipulated in the Protocol on the Release and Handover of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups, signed in 2013 between the United Nations and the Government of Mali, 72 boys, from 13 to 17 years of age, who were arrested and detained by the Government for their alleged association with armed groups, were released during the period under review. However, their detention periods varied from a few days or weeks to nearly five years. Two children were detained for 35 months and one for 60 months. At least two of the children were ill-treated while in custody. At the time of writing, three children, aged 16 and 17, who have been detained since April 2015, May 2015 and May 2016, respectively, remained

in the Government's custody. In addition, in 2015, 14 children were deprived of their liberty by armed groups.

29. The United Nations has advocated and continues to advocate with the Malian authorities for the release of the children from government detention. The coordination with the Ministry of Justice on the implementation of the Protocol has been challenging at times owing to the fact that the position of governmental focal point for the Protocol has been vacant since 2016.

B. Killing and maiming

30. Forty-three children were killed and 102 maimed in 92 incidents in the regions of Kidal, Timbuktu, Gao and Mopti as a result of direct hostilities, rocket attacks against civilians or security posts held by the Malian Defence and Security Forces, crossfire between parties to the conflict and improvised explosive devices. It was therefore not possible in most cases to attribute responsibility to a specific party to the conflict. The documented incidents also included four instances of attacks on MINUSMA, resulting in five children killed and eight wounded in Kidal, Gao and on the Gao-Anéfis road in 2015 (three incidents) and 2016 (one incident). For example, a child was killed during a suicide attack on the MINUSMA camp in Ansongo in 2015, during which five other children and several peacekeepers were injured. Child casualties were also caused by explosive remnants of war, including hand grenades.

31. In 2014, the number of child casualties was 32 (9 children killed, 23 maimed). Figures increased slightly in 2015, with 54 casualties (15 children killed and 39 maimed), and remained about the same in 2016, with 46 casualties (11 children killed, 35 maimed), followed by a significant drop in verified casualties in the first six months of 2017, with 13 casualties (8 children killed, 5 maimed). During the reporting period, explosive remnants of war were a leading cause of child casualties, with a total of 88 children affected, 21 of whom were killed and 67 maimed, in the Mopti, Gao and Kidal regions. Approximately 61 per cent of all child casualties were caused by improvised explosive devices or explosive remnants of war. In most instances, explosive remnants of war were found by children, who mistook them for toys or played with them. For example, in March 2016, a 14-year-old boy in Tabankort, Gao region, suffered the amputation of his right hand after picking up and playing with an explosive remnant of war. The victim was evacuated to the hospital in Gao to receive medical care.

32. In 2016, 30 per cent of the 46 child casualties occurred in Kidal during armed confrontations between CMA and the Platform. The Malian Defence and Security Forces, GATIA and HCUA were also involved in incidents resulting in child casualties (one each).

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

33. Monitoring and reporting on rape and other forms of sexual violence was severely limited owing to several factors: the prevailing insecurity in the northern and central regions, fears of reprisal, the lack of protection for victims and witnesses, the lack of holistic and continued services provided to survivors, limited access to justice and the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence.

34. During the reporting period, the United Nations documented 68 incidents of sexual violence against children, of which 63 were verified; 63 children were affected. Although the number of incidents generally decreased throughout the period under review (2 in the first half of 2017, compared with 38 in 2014, 22 in 2015 and 6 in

2016), it is believed that incidents of sexual violence were underreported and that the number of incidents is probably much higher. In 64 per cent of the instances reported during the period, it was difficult to establish the identity of the perpetrators.

35. In 2014, 38 girls were victims of sexual violence perpetrated by MNLA (6), the Malian armed forces (4) and unidentified armed elements (28) in Gao and Timbuktu. In 2015, of the 22 verified cases, 3 were attributed to the Malian armed forces, 1 to the Platform and 18 to unidentified armed men. In 2016, numbers dropped to six reported cases affecting six girls, two of which were verified and attributed to MAA-Platform and to an alleged MUJAO element. The four unverified cases involved four girls who were reportedly victims of sexual violence during their association with GATIA in the Gao region. However, that information could not be verified at the time of writing. In the first half of 2017, a 12-year-old girl was abducted and raped in Goundam Cercle, Mopti region, by unidentified armed men who attacked her village. The victim, who was abducted along with an unspecified number of other girls, was released a few hours later and received medical care. Another case of rape allegedly perpetrated by a member of the Malian armed forces was reported but could not be confirmed. While the majority of incidents of sexual violence documented during the reporting period affected girls, boys were also targeted. For example, in 2015, 16 boys and 3 girls were allegedly sexually abused by the head of an Islamic school affiliated with MUJAO.

36. Little progress was observed with regard to the fight against impunity through the investigation of allegations, prosecution and conviction of those responsible for sexual violence against children by national authorities. At least two suspects were released from detention without charge in July 2014 as part of confidence-building measures under the framework of the peace negotiations. Moreover, child victims of sexual violence in the north faced difficulties in accessing justice owing to, inter alia, the absence of courts in certain areas, the limited capacity of judicial personnel, a lack of medical services and fears of reprisal and stigmatization, the absence of protection for victims and witnesses and extrajudicial arrangements. The situation was exacerbated by the continued crisis in the northern and central regions and limited access by humanitarian actors outside of urban centres.

37. On a positive note, in November 2014 104 cases of complaints of sexual violence from 2012 and 2013 attributed to MNLA, Ansar Eddine and MUJAO were submitted for the first time for investigation and prosecution before Malian courts. The cases were presented by Malian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on behalf of women and girl survivors of sexual violence between the ages of 9 and 55. The cases were filed as crimes against humanity and war crimes. Since then, 37 survivors have been heard by a Bamako-based judge, but no prosecution had started at the time of writing. The implementation of the Supreme Court's order of February 2015, which returned jurisdiction for crimes committed during the crisis to tribunals in the north of Mali, has hampered proceedings for those cases considerably.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

38. The United Nations documented a sustained rise in the number of attacks against schools and related protected personnel in northern and central Mali throughout the reporting period. In total, 66 incidents were recorded and 51 were verified, including instances of the killing and threats of killing of teachers, and the destruction of infrastructure.

39. While only 1 attack against a school was verified in 2014, 13 attacks and threats of attacks were verified in 2015, mostly perpetrated by FLM. In 2016, the number of verified incidents of attacks increased to 15 and included the killing of a school

director in Mopti by unidentified armed elements allegedly hostile to Western education and State authorities. That alarming trend continued in the first half of 2017, which witnessed a continued increase with 22 verified attacks in Mopti (18), Kidal (1), Timbuktu (2) and Gao (1) regions, all by unidentified armed men.

40. Since 2015, the attacks and threats of attacks on schools and related personnel have had a severe impact on access to education for tens of thousands of children. Hundreds of teachers left northern and central Mali owing to insecurity and the attacks and threats of attacks from armed groups. Alarming developments were observed in the Mopti region in 2015 following the killing of a village leader by FLM and the systematic targeting of teachers and village leaders in six communes of that region, leading to the closure of 93 schools, affecting hundreds of children. In 2016, continued threats against local authorities, teachers and students in parts of the Mopti region led to the closure of 25 per cent of schools in those areas. As of 2017, owing to insecurity generated by direct threats by armed groups to close public schools associated with Western education, 266 of 1,849 schools were closed, representing 14 per cent of schools in the entire Mopti region. That resulted in 79,800 children being unable to access schools in the Mopti region alone. In northern Mali, it is estimated that more than 380,000 children aged 7 to 15 have been out of school since 2016 owing to school closures as a result of insecurity and attacks on infrastructure.

41. The use of schools by armed groups for military purposes remained a concern. In 2014, the United Nations verified the military use of 20 schools, attributed mainly to MNLA and to joint troops of MNLA, HCUA, MAA-CMA and CPA, in Gao (11), Kidal (4), Timbuktu (4) and Mopti (1). As of the end of 2015, 7 schools were still used for military purposes by armed groups, which increased again in 2016 to 14 schools. As of the end of June 2017, 14 schools continued to be used by armed groups: 5 by CMA, 3 by the Platform and 6 by unidentified perpetrators in the regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal.

42. Nine attacks on medical personnel were verified in 2016, and two more were verified in the first half of 2017, all of which were perpetrated by unidentified armed men. For example, on 4 April 2016, a medical team from Timbuktu carrying out a vaccination campaign was attacked and robbed of an ambulance, medical equipment and supplies. As a result, the vaccination campaign was suspended. The two attacks verified in 2017 involved the looting of a hospital in Nibkit, Timbuktu region, where malnourished children were being attended to. In addition, in March 2014, a health-care centre in Ménaka was used by MNLA.

E. Abduction

43. The United Nations documented the abduction of 12 boys and 3 girls during the reporting period, 2 of whom were abducted in 2014, 1 in 2015, 7 in 2016 and 5 in 2017.

44. The purpose of the abductions could not always be ascertained. However, all abductees, except two girls, were from the Tuareg ethnic group and at least four were said to be relatives of leaders and commanders of armed groups. Abductions took place in the Kidal region (seven children), Ménaka (three), Bamako (two) and in Timbuktu, Mopti and Gao (one each). While attributing responsibility was not always possible, CMA was reportedly responsible for abducting seven children, and GATIA one. All children were released within a few days to a few weeks after their abduction.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

45. The operational environment remained extremely volatile in northern and central Mali, and targeted attacks against humanitarian personnel and facilities contributed to the disruption of the delivery of assistance, which had a severe impact on children. Temporary suspensions of activities of humanitarian organizations also occurred, which in some cases hindered the implementation of projects and the delivery of life-saving services for children such as medical care, vaccinations and nutrition.

46. The United Nations documented 224 incidents of denial of humanitarian access during the period under review, all by unidentified perpetrators. Incidents involved the killing of humanitarian workers, kidnapping, acts of violence, armed robbery and carjacking.

47. In 2014, the United Nations documented 24 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, including the killing of two humanitarian workers by an improvised explosive device. Recurrence of hostilities between parties to the conflict, in particular following the clashes in Kidal in May 2014, led to the complete suspension of humanitarian activities for several days in some areas of the Gao region, which hampered the delivery of assistance to vulnerable populations.

48. In 2015, 69 incidents were documented. CMA forced a medical NGO supporting two health centres in the Timbuktu region to withdraw. In addition, the killing of an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) worker during an attack led by MUJAO in Gao led to the temporary suspension of ICRC movement in the area.

49. In 2016, 43 incidents against humanitarian workers were documented, while 28 remained allegations. They included carjackings and attacks against NGO vehicles, offices and staff as well as against ambulances of local health centres. At least two NGOs were compelled to temporarily suspend their humanitarian programmes in the Mopti and Timbuktu regions owing to the deteriorating security situation. Access to the Kidal region was severely hampered by continued insecurity throughout the year. In addition, the airport in Kidal remained closed from April to July 2016, following a violent demonstration against MINUSMA that damaged the airstrip and further hindered the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the local population, including children.

50. In comparison with 2016, the number of cases of denial of humanitarian access increased during the first half of 2017: 60 incidents were reported, affecting the delivery of assistance to vulnerable populations, including children, in the regions of Ménaka, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. Four staff members of ICRC and one international NGO staff member were kidnapped in the Mopti region. They were subsequently released through negotiations. One aid worker was killed and five others injured in the first half of 2017. The order by the Government of Mali in February 2017 to restrict the use of motorcycles, which are widely used as a mode of transport, in the Ségou and Mopti regions severely affected the access of the population to health centres and education and hampered the delivery of aid in the central part of the country. The restrictions were imposed for an unlimited period of time.

V. Advocacy and dialogue with parties to the conflict

51. Since 2014, the United Nations has engaged with armed groups, which resulted in the signing of local command orders by MAA-CMA and MNLA (both members of CMA) prohibiting grave violations against children. In addition, on 12 February 2016,

CMA signed a declaration renewing its commitment to end the recruitment and use of children and allowing for the screening of its troops.

52. The most notable progress was observed on 5 March 2017, when CMA signed an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children. The plan translated into action the public commitment made by CMA in February 2016 and is binding on all entities composing CMA, including MNLA, which is listed in the annexes of my annual report on children and armed conflict. However, the challenging security context has hampered the swift implementation of the action plan and, at the time of writing, discussions were still being held on priority activities to be implemented under the plan.

53. Dialogue with CMA and the Platform continued throughout the reporting period and both coalitions of armed groups committed to releasing the children from their ranks. During the registration in December 2016 and January 2017 of 390 CMA and the Platform combatants joining the mixed patrols in Gao, the United Nations identified 10 children, aged 16 and 17. Discussions were ongoing at the time of writing with CMA and the Platform, both of which pledged to hand over the children to child protection partners for provisional care and family tracing. In addition, between December 2016 and January 2017, Platform leaders informed the United Nations of approximately 70 children associated with the group and highlighted the need to put in place effective reintegration programmes to prevent their being recruited again by other armed groups.

54. In 2016, progress was made in engaging parties to the conflict in the fight against sexual violence against children. On 29 June 2016, the Platform signed a unilateral communiqué committing its military and political leaders to addressing conflict-related sexual violence against adults and children. The following day, on 30 June, Platform political and military leaders signed a unilateral communiqué committing CMFPR-I, MAA-Platform and GATIA to addressing conflict-related sexual violence. A one-year implementation plan was adopted in October 2016.

VI. Progress made on the national framework for the protection of children

55. The recruitment and use of children under the age of 15 is a criminal offense under Malian criminal law, but with the caveat that it only applies to the Malian armed forces and in the context of international armed conflict. The law makes no reference to children from 15 to 18 years of age. In January 2015, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family organized a workshop to validate the revised 2002 Malian Child Protection Code. The revised Code includes specific provisions on the protection of children affected by armed conflict and penalizes the recruitment and use of children under the age of 15, by both armed forces and armed groups, as a war crime in accordance with international law. However, the revised Code still makes no mention of the recruitment and use of children from 15 to 18 years of age. The revised Code had not been adopted by Parliament at the time of writing. Advocacy is ongoing by the country task force on monitoring and reporting to address the issue.

56. In July 2014, the Government adopted a national policy on child protection and promotion providing for the protection and care of children affected by the armed conflict, to be implemented through a five-year action plan (2015–2019). The policy focuses on the need to raise the awareness of children, families, communities, authorities and members of armed forces and armed groups of the risks linked to the association of children with armed groups and the presence of children at militarized

areas. The policy also focuses on mine risk education, the prevention of sexual violence and psychosocial care. The Government disseminated an inter-ministerial circular on the prevention, protection and return to families of children associated with armed forces and groups, and established a road map for the sensitization of children, communities, leaders and members of community protection structures to the prevention of child recruitment, sexual violence and other violations of children's rights.

57. On 15 January 2014, a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission was established and mandated, *inter alia*, to investigate grave human rights violations since 1960. It included a specific gender unit that also handled issues related to children. Offices were established in four regions and in Bamako. Forty-five personnel of the Commission were trained in child rights and protection by the country task force on monitoring and reporting. Guidance was also provided on ways to ensure the confidentiality and security of child victims, and on how to interact with children, including during the statement-taking phase that started in January 2017. Victims, including 98 children, have begun to file statements with the Commission. Combined with the international commission of inquiry yet to be established to investigate war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and other gross violations of international law in Mali, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission will be instrumental in ensuring a framework for accountability for crimes against children.

58. Personnel of the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission established in December 2015 were trained by the country task force on monitoring and reporting on the procedures established for the separation and reintegration of children associated with armed groups. For example, child-friendly zones have been established within cantonment sites. In May 2016, a new National Human Rights Commission was established, in line with the Paris Principles, relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights. Commissioners were appointed in May 2017.

59. My Special Representative and the country task force on monitoring and reporting have initiated advocacy efforts with the governments constituting the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, as well as concerned stakeholders, to ensure that the protection of children is kept as a priority in the conduct of military operations, on the need for predeployment child protection training for the Joint Force troops and to ensure that handover protocols are in place for the handling of children associated with armed groups and their immediate transfer to civilian child protection actors. In addition, my Special Representative and the country task force are advocating for the appointment of a child protection adviser, to be based at the Joint Force headquarters, to ensure the mainstreaming of child protection within the Joint Force.

VII. Follow-up to the conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

60. As called for by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in its conclusions on children and armed conflict in Mali (S/AC.51/2014/2), the Malian authorities have taken steps to prevent underage recruitment, in particular through the appointment of focal points from relevant ministries to be involved in an age assessment and screening mechanism within the Malian Defence and Security Forces. However, the joint United Nations-Government mechanism for the screening and age assessment of new recruits has yet to be established.

61. In order to address the absence of child protection provisions in the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali signed in 2015, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family validated, in January 2017, a Government-led study analysing ways to mainstream child protection in the implementation of the Agreement. The study serves as a reference document for increasing the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including by prioritizing the protection of children in the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategy.

62. In December 2016, following sustained advocacy by the United Nations for the integration of children's needs in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the Malian authorities appointed a senior defence official to serve as an expert on issues related to women and children within the newly established National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission. That senior focal point is expected to ensure the integration of specific provisions relating to children into the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, which was also adopted in December 2016. Although not yet fully funded, the programme will contain provisions for children, including the establishment of procedures for their separation and handover to child protection actors. During the same month, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family adopted a national child separation and reintegration strategy as a preamble to a national child disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategy.

63. Within the eight cantonment sites that were set up as part of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, separate facilities were built for children associated with armed groups. The United Nations developed specific child protection measures to be put in place ahead of the cantonment process; in particular, age assessment and separation procedures were established to ensure that children identified through the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process were promptly separated and transferred to child protection actors. Sensitization sessions on the specific needs of children undergoing the process were conducted in communities surrounding three of the cantonment sites in the Gao and Timbuktu regions.

64. UNICEF has been working in close collaboration with the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family and other partners to reinforce community-based mechanisms focused on prevention and response in order to benefit vulnerable children, including those who have spontaneously self-demobilized and those at risk of recruitment, re-recruitment or other forms of violence.

65. UNICEF supported the operationalization of a transit and orientation centre in Gao for children released from armed groups, and continued to support the centre already established in Bamako. From 2014 to June 2017, 28 boys went through an official handover process and transited through the Bamako centre, where they benefited from interim care. At the time of writing, all of the children had been reunited with their families, except for two boys, pending the conclusion of their family tracing. At least 140 other children, including 2 girls, from 11 to 17 years of age, who escaped from armed groups between 2014 and April 2017 in Gao (63), Ménaka (28), Kidal (46) Timbuktu (2) and Segou (1) regions, benefited from psychosocial support and a reintegration package.

66. Thanks to the "back to school" campaign led by the Ministry of Education, with the support of UNICEF and other partners, 983 schools reopened in Mali in 2014 (74 per cent of the 1,320 schools operating before the crisis) and 4,424 teachers resumed their functions (77 per cent of the 5,772 teachers posted in the north before the crisis). During the 2014/15 school year, the school enrolment rate was back to 94 per cent of the 2011 level. During the 2015/16 school year, UNICEF supported the reopening of over one third of previously closed schools in central and northern Mali (157 of 454),

ensuring the enrolment of an estimated 47,100 children. In the Kidal region, where schools had remained closed for more than four years, UNICEF helped reopen 21 of 62 schools, providing access to schooling to over 3,800 children.

67. UNICEF and other partners have continued to undertake an accelerated mine risk education programme to prevent incidents and mitigate the impact of explosive remnants of war on children. Activities were focused on areas identified as polluted or where clearance operations had been conducted by the United Nations Mine Action Service. A total of 1,093,654 people have been directly reached by mine risk education activities, while 525 personnel from government, civil society and implementing partners have been trained to conduct mine risk education activities.

VIII. Observations and recommendations

68. The slow implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and increasing insecurity in the north and central regions continue to fuel grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in Mali, in particular the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children. I urge all parties in Mali to immediately halt grave violations against children. Armed groups must release all children in their ranks, abide by international humanitarian and human rights law and comply with Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict.

69. The numerous incidents of attacks against schools and related protected personnel remain a grave concern. Armed groups must prevent and stop such attacks and the military use of such facilities.

70. I urge all parties in Mali to ensure the safe access by humanitarian actors to populations affected by the conflict, and to provide necessary humanitarian assistance and basic social services, in line with international humanitarian law.

71. The commitment and efforts made by the Government of Mali for the protection of children, in particular through the strengthening of its national legal framework, are noteworthy. I encourage the Government to continue such efforts and to finalize the revision of the Child Protection Code, including the criminalization of the recruitment and use of children from 15 to 18 years of age.

72. The implementation by the Government of Mali of the Protocol on the Release and Handover of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups adopted in July 2013 is a positive development. To build on it, I urge the Government of Mali to work with the United Nations to review the cases of minors detained on charges related to armed conflict and association with armed groups.

73. Child protection provisions must be fully taken into account by all stakeholders engaged in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. I further call upon the Government of Mali to ensure that all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes and security sector reforms take into account the specific needs of boys and girls affected by the armed conflict and the protection of their rights, including through the development of a gender-sensitive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

74. I commend the signing of an action plan by CMA to end and prevent child recruitment, sexual violence and other grave violations against children, and I commend the fact that the commitment is binding to all entities composing CMA. I call upon CMA to implement speedily, fully and effectively the action plan and to meet its commitments to ending the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence and other grave violations against children.

75. Similarly, I welcome the unilateral communiqué signed by the Platform, in June 2016, to respond to conflict-related sexual violence. I also encourage the leadership of the Platform to continue the dialogue with the United Nations to take concrete measures to end the recruitment and use of children.

76. To address impunity, I call upon the Government to continue its efforts by strengthening the justice system, swiftly bringing perpetrators to justice and ensuring that all victims have access to justice and the medical and support services that they need.

77. Sexual violence must end. Ensuring timely and appropriate care for child survivors by improving geographic coverage and the quality of care in the most vulnerable areas should remain a priority for international partners. I also encourage the Government to redouble its efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence, including by holding accountable perpetrators of such crimes.

78. I urge the Government of Mali, as well as the other Heads of State of the Group of Five for the Sahel, to take into account the association of children with armed groups, to protect and consider as victims those children who have been released or separated from armed groups and to pay particular attention to the protection, release and reintegration of all children associated with those groups.



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**Prevention of armed conflict: strengthening the role of
mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes,
conflict prevention and resolution**

**Letter dated 19 February 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i.
of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to enclose herewith the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine regarding the filing of its memorial in arbitration proceedings against the Russian Federation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (see annex).

I would appreciate your kind assistance in having the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 34 (b), and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Yuriy Vitrenko
Chargé d'affaires a.i.



**Annex to the letter dated 19 February 2018 from the Chargé
d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the
United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

**Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine regarding
the filing of its memorial in arbitration proceedings against the
Russian Federation under the United Nations Convention on the
Law of the Sea**

On 19 February 2018, Ukraine filed its Memorial in arbitration proceedings against the Russian Federation under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea ("UNCLOS"). The Memorial establishes that Russia has violated Ukraine's sovereign rights in the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Kerch Strait.

Since 2014, Russia has unlawfully excluded Ukraine from exercising its maritime rights; it has exploited Ukraine's sovereign resources for its own ends; and it has usurped Ukraine's right to regulate within its own maritime areas. Through these violations of international law, Russia is stealing Ukraine's energy and fisheries resources, harming the livelihoods of Ukrainian fishermen, and blocking traffic to Ukrainian ports with its illegal bridge over the Kerch Strait, among other serious violations.

Ukraine asks the Tribunal to end the Russian Federation's violations of UNCLOS and vindicate Ukraine's rights in the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Kerch Strait, including by ordering Russia to respect Ukraine's sovereign rights in its own waters, to cease its theft of Ukraine's resources, and to pay reparation for hydrocarbon resources Russia has wrongfully taken, among other relief.

Ukraine initiated arbitration proceedings against the Russian Federation in September 2016. A five-member Tribunal sitting in The Hague has been constituted to hear Ukraine's case. Ukraine is vindicating its rights in the face of Russia's flagrant violations of international law in appropriate international forums, including the UNCLOS case, as well as Ukraine's case against the Russian Federation before the International Court of Justice.

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**Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014),
2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and
2393 (2017)****Report of the Secretary-General****I. Introduction**

1. The present report is the forty-eighth submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of resolution 2165 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2191 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2258 (2015), paragraph 5 of resolution 2332 (2016) and paragraph 6 of resolution 2393 (2017), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report, every 30 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on data available to agencies of the United Nations system¹ and from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other relevant sources. Data from agencies of the United Nations system on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the period from 1 to 31 January 2018.

¹ Inputs provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Children's Fund, the International Organization for Migration, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Population Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Nations Mine Action Service, the Department of Political Affairs and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat.



II. Major developments

Box 1

Key points: January 2018

1. During the reporting period, military activity in parts of the country had a significant impact on the civilian population, resulting in deaths, injuries and displacement, causing damage to civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, and affecting the ability of United Nations agencies and their partners to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance.
2. In besieged eastern Ghutah, in Rif Dimashq, near daily shelling of several areas, particularly in the eastern areas of the enclave, and in Duma and Nashabiyah, resulted in civilian deaths and injuries, internal displacement within the besieged area and destruction of civilian infrastructure. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported 124 deaths during the month of January in eastern Ghutah. Shelling was also reported from eastern Ghutah into Damascus; OHCHR reported that 11 people had been killed in Damascus from the shelling during the month (see annex for a full list of casualties reported by OHCHR for January).
3. Intense fighting continued in Idlib, northern Hama and southern Aleppo Governorates, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, as well as large-scale displacement. From 15 December 2017 through 29 January 2018, the displacement of more than 300,000 people was recorded, with those displaced moving to the central and northern parts of Idlib Governorate. Medical facilities were particularly hard hit in Idlib, with 14 attacks against medical facilities verified by the health cluster during the month.
4. Some 66,000 civilians were reported to have returned to Raqqah city since October 2017. The widespread presence of explosive hazards, including unexploded ordnance, landmines and improvised explosive devices, throughout the city continues to pose a significant risk to civilians, as well as to humanitarian workers. According to partners on the ground, more than 500 civilians have died or have been injured since the city was retaken from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in October 2017.
5. The United Nations in Jordan undertook a one-time aid operation on an exceptional basis from 8 to 12 January, delivering emergency life-saving assistance, including food and non-food items, to 50,000 people stranded at Rukban camp along the border between Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic.
6. In January, United Nations humanitarian assistance reached millions of people in need in the Syrian Arab Republic, including nearly 2 million people who received food assistance through regular deliveries. Access to besieged areas continued to be a challenge, with no convoys to any besieged area for the second month in a row.

3. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria held a special meeting in the framework of the intra-Syrian talks facilitated by the United Nations in Vienna on 25 and 26 January to discuss constitutional issues as one aspect of the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). Delegations from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition Syrian Negotiation Commission participated in the talks. The Russian Federation hosted the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi on 30 January, with the support of Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey.

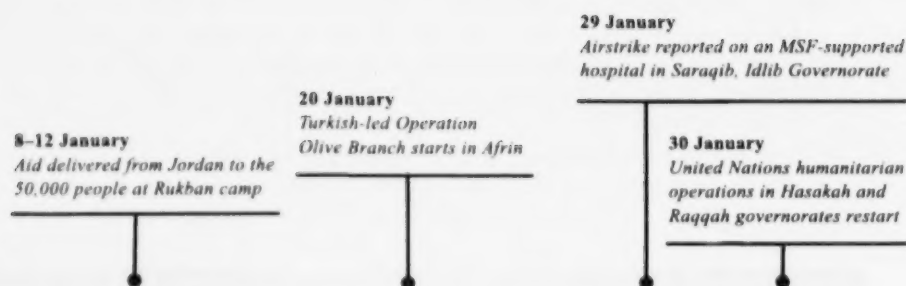
4. Military activity in parts of the country had a significant impact on the civilian population, resulting in civilian deaths, injuries and displacement, as well as causing damage to civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, and affecting the ability of United Nations agencies and their partners to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance. Other parts of the country, including areas where local agreements had been reached, oftentimes after heavy military activity between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and non-State armed opposition groups, reportedly remained relatively calm.

5. In besieged eastern Ghutah, in Rif Dimashq, near daily shelling of several areas, particularly in eastern areas of the enclave, and in Duma and Nashabiyah, resulted in civilian deaths and injuries, internal displacement within the besieged area and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported 124 deaths during the month of January. Prices for basic goods remain far beyond the purchasing power of most residents of eastern Ghutah. The humanitarian situation inside the besieged enclave was further compounded by the inability of United Nations humanitarian inter-agency convoys to be deployed to the area since 28 November. No medical evacuations took place during the month, although a growing number of people (up to 750), the majority of them women and children, remained in need of evacuation. Through the end of January, 19 people died while awaiting evacuation, and two others died after their evacuation. Attacks on residential neighbourhoods of Damascus city also continued from eastern Ghutah during the reporting period, resulting in deaths, injuries and material damage. OHCHR reported that 11 people had been killed in Damascus as a result of the shelling during the month (see annex for a full list of casualties reported by OHCHR for January).

6. Intense fighting between forces of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and non-State armed opposition groups continued in the north-eastern countryside of Hama Governorate, the southern and south-eastern countryside of Idlib Governorate and the southern countryside of Aleppo Governorate, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries, large-scale displacement and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. From 15 December through 29 January, over 300,000 displacements were recorded, with those displaced moving from all three governorates to the central and northern parts of Idlib Governorate. Many of those forced to flee had been displaced previously. Of the 1.7 million people in need in Idlib Governorate, more than 1 million people had been internally displaced before the recent escalation in violence. Camps for the displaced are overstretched, forcing most of those who have been displaced to seek shelter in some 160 makeshift settlements.

7. Medical facilities were particularly hard hit in Idlib Governorate, with 14 attacks against medical facilities verified by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners during the month of January alone. This included an attack on 29 January on a hospital supported by Médecins Sans Frontières in the Saraqib district of Idlib, a district where 7 of the 14 verified attacks on hospitals occurred. One person was killed and eight others were injured; the hospital is no longer in service. This was the second strike reported on the hospital in nine days. Some of those in the hospital at the time of the airstrike had reportedly just been admitted following an attack on a nearby market hours earlier.

Figure 1
Key dates in January 2018



Abbreviation: MSF, Médecins Sans Frontières.

8. On 20 January, the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations in New York informed the Secretary-General and the Security Council by letter that Turkey had "initiated a military operation on 20 January 2018 ... aimed at ensuring [Turkey's] border security [and] neutralizing terrorists in Afrin" (see S/2018/53). Turkish artillery shelling and airstrikes reportedly hit areas of Afrin district near the border with Turkey, in addition to other areas held by the Kurdish People's Protection Units. There have been allegations of civilian deaths and injuries, as well as of displacement. Local authorities are also reportedly restricting movement, with civilians not allowed to exit the district at checkpoints. Some 2,000 people have, however, been registered as displaced from Afrin district to elsewhere in Aleppo Governorate since 20 January. The United Nations temporarily suspended its cross-border operations from 21 to 31 January owing to shelling from Afrin into Turkey.

Box 2

Yarmouk camp and Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham

Yarmouk camp and Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham form an encircled area of roughly 20 km², stretching from Damascus to 5 km south of the city. The control of the area is split between non-State armed groups and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), with the western neighbourhoods of Yarmouk camp, Hajar al-Aswad and Isali largely held by ISIL, and the eastern and southern neighbourhoods of Yalda, Babila, Bayt Saham and Qadam held by non-State armed groups. Tadamon, east of Yarmouk camp, remains a highly contested area.

Prior to the conflict, Yarmouk camp was a Palestinian refugee camp with nearly 150,000 registered Palestinian refugees. Today, the estimated 12,500 people in Yarmouk camp are classified by the United Nations as besieged by ISIL and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, while 29,600 people are estimated to live in hard-to-reach Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham. The United Nations last reached Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham on 26 October 2017, when the Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered multisectoral assistance provided by the United Nations for 35,000 people.

Yarmouk camp was last reached by the United Nations on 7 September 2017, when 2,000 people there received health, food and nutritional assistance and non-food items from by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent as part of an agreement between the different besieging actors. A United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy requested for Yarmouk camp under the January/February 2018 plan was not approved by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

9. A total of 66,000 civilians have reportedly returned to Raqqah city since October 2017, including to neighbourhoods that constituted the last stronghold of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fighters and are therefore particularly heavily mined and riddled with deadly booby traps. The widespread presence of explosive hazards, including unexploded ordnance, landmines and improvised explosive devices, throughout the city continues to pose a significant risk to civilians, as well as to humanitarian workers. The systematic survey, marking and subsequent removal of such explosive hazards is a pre-condition for enabling the safe return of civilians and the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. More than 112 civilians were killed and a further 422 injured in blasts after the city was retaken from ISIL in October 2017. Each week, an average of 50 civilians arrive at trauma centres in Raqqah city after being wounded by improvised explosive devices. In a further alarming trend, a growing number of the victims are children. Humanitarian agencies continue to emphasize that, owing to the high prevalence of landmines, booby traps and explosive remnants of war, Raqqah city is not safe for civilian returns. Owing to these conditions, humanitarian organizations continue to discourage returns to the city and only have a limited presence on the ground.

10. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Syrian Democratic Forces have continued to push ISIL out of areas along the Euphrates river in southern rural Dayr al-Zawr Governorate, although ISIL still controls pockets along the Syrian Arab Republic-Iraq border, along the eastern bank of the Euphrates river and across the south-western border of Dayr al-Zawr Governorate with Homs Governorate. Beyond Raqqah city, mine action partners also express concern about the widespread presence of explosive hazards in areas formerly under ISIL control, which has an impact on the safe return of civilians and hampers the safe delivery of humanitarian aid in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Reports indicate, however, that the Syrian authorities have declared the Albu Kamal and Mayadin sub-districts in Dayr al-Zawr Governorate as cleared for civilian returns, and that at least 15,000 people have returned to these areas.

11. The United Nations in Jordan undertook a one-time aid operation on an exceptional basis from 8 to 12 January to deliver emergency life-saving assistance, including food and non-food items, to 50,000 people stranded at Rukban camp along the border between Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. At the same time, the United Nations continues to work to reach a sustainable solution for aid deliveries from Damascus. A request for regular access by the United Nations from within the Syrian Arab Republic to support those in need at Rukban camp has been pending since September.

12. The United States Department of Defense publicly reported that in January the United States-led coalition had carried out 276 strikes against ISIL targets in the Governorates of Dayr al-Zawr and Hasakah. All but one of those strikes were near Albu Kamal in Dayr al-Zawr. Additionally, the United States-led coalition publicly reported that on 20 January it had conducted precision strikes in the middle Euphrates River valley region near Sha'fa, and that operations had been conducted in the Dayr al-Zawr towns of Hajin on 2 January, Kharaj and Abu Hammam on 6 January and Kashmah on 12 January.

13. The Ministry of Defence of the Syrian Arab Republic publicly reported that Government forces and their allies had conducted operations in Aleppo, Hama, Idlib and Rif Dimashq Governorates in January. It also reported that on 21 January those forces had captured Abu al-Zuhur military base in Idlib Governorate.

Protection

14. Air and ground-based strikes continued to kill and injure civilians and to damage and destroy civilian infrastructure throughout the month. Explosive weapons continued to be fired into populated areas, indiscriminately killing and injuring civilians, destroying and damaging vital infrastructure and leaving communities littered with hazards that continued to kill and injure civilians and impede humanitarian access. The use of improvised explosive devices in certain areas added to the complexity of the explosive hazard threat. The large number of civilian casualties and the scale of civilian destruction remain a strong indication that violations of the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution, and of the consequent prohibition on the launching of indiscriminate attacks, are continuing. Children are particularly affected by the fighting.

15. Fighting continued to affect civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities, schools, markets and places of worship. On the basis of information received by OHCHR, civilian casualties occurred in various Governorates, in possible violation of international humanitarian law. OHCHR has documented alleged incidents perpetrated by parties to the conflict, including government forces and their allies, non-State armed opposition groups and their allies, and Security Council-designated terrorist groups.

16. In addition to violations documented by OHCHR, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic provided OHCHR with information on alleged violations. In a note verbale received on 1 February, the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva provided OHCHR with a list of reported victims and civilians who had been injured between 22 December and 21 January in the Governorates of Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Dar'a, Suwayda', Homs, Hama, Tartus, Ladhqiyyah, Idlib, Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah, Qunaytirah and Raqqah. A total of 23 civilians, including 2 children, were reported to have been killed, while 175 civilians, including 36 children, were reported to have been injured. The casualties reportedly resulted from mortars and improvised explosive devices.

17. Despite the call made to the Syrian authorities by the Human Rights Council in its resolutions S-18/1 and 19/22 to cooperate with OHCHR, including through the establishment of a field presence with a mandate to protect and promote human rights, OHCHR reporting remains limited, as the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has not granted access to the country.

18. The United Nations and its health partners verified 28 attacks that affected health-care facilities and personnel in January. Seven attacks were in the eastern Ghutah region of Rif Dimashq, comprising four attacks on primary health centres and three attacks that resulted in the killing of three health workers. Sixteen attacks were reported in Idlib, comprising attacks on six hospitals, a blood bank, six primary health centres and an ambulance. Three hospitals in Hama Governorate and one in Aleppo Governorate were attacked. The directorate of health in Dar'a was also hit by an airstrike.

19. Educational facilities also continued to suffer the impact of the fighting. On 12 January in Zamalka, eastern Ghutah, the director of a school was killed by a stray bullet as a result of the ongoing clashes in the area. On 16 January in New Shahba', Aleppo Governorate, a mortar hit a kindergarten, severely injuring a 2-year-old boy and killing a kindergarten staff member, as well as injuring two teachers and one other staff member. The 2-year-old boy later died from his injuries at the hospital.

Humanitarian access

Box 3

Key points for humanitarian access

1. In January, United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need, including from within the Syrian Arab Republic. Regular programming reached nearly 2 million people with food assistance through 1,567 deliveries.
2. At the same time, not a single convoy of life-saving relief, food and medical supplies was authorized to any besieged area in January. The last United Nations inter-agency convoy to a besieged location took place on 28 November, to Nashabiyah in eastern Ghutah, providing assistance to only 7,200 people.
3. Cross-border assistance remains a vital part of the humanitarian response in the Syrian Arab Republic. In January, 471 trucks used in 20 consignments delivered life-saving assistance to nearly 670,000 people in need in northern and southern areas of the country, through cross-border deliveries. On 31 January, the United Nations resumed its cross-border deliveries from the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point in Turkey into Idlib Governorate. A total of 25 trucks delivered food and medical supplies into the Syrian Arab Republic on 31 January, the first delivery following the United Nations decision on 20 January to temporarily halt deliveries as a result of security concerns.
4. In Hasakah Governorate, an agreement was reached on 30 January to allow 7 out of 11 national non-governmental organizations partnering with the United Nations to resume humanitarian deliveries, after a month in which most United Nations humanitarian assistance had come to a halt owing to restrictions from Syrian and local authorities.
5. In Raqqah city, conditions remain unsafe for the return of displaced people. Among people trying to return home, more than 500 civilians have died or been injured by unexploded ordinance. Medical and other essential services are limited, and access for humanitarian workers to the city remains almost impossible.

20. The delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need remained extremely challenging in many areas of the country as a result of active conflict, shifting conflict lines, administrative impediments and deliberate restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods by the parties to the conflict. In particular, access by the United Nations and its partners to people living in besieged and hard-to-reach locations remained a critical concern. On average in 2017, 27 per cent of beneficiaries scheduled for assistance under specific requests were reached through inter-agency cross-line convoys each month (see figure II). Bureaucratic impediments, such as the non-issuance of facilitation letters by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, continued to be a significant factor in delays or non-deliveries, despite the creation of a tripartite coordination mechanism to address such problems. The last meeting of the mechanism was on 12 December 2017, at which time there were no breakthroughs on access-related issues.

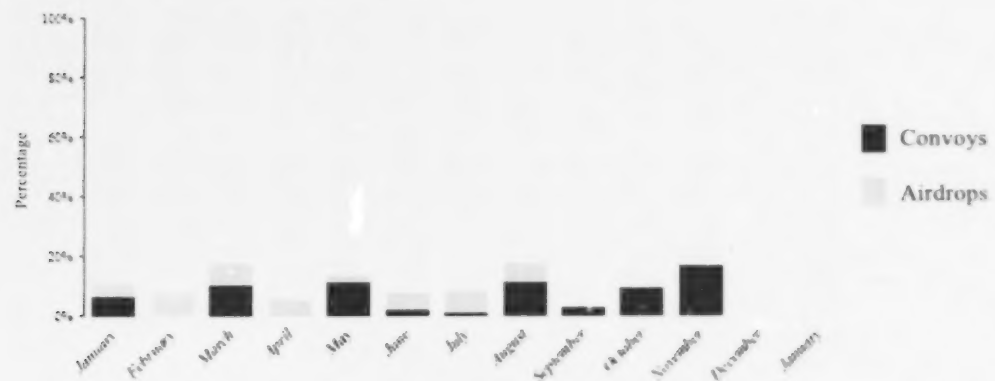
21. The United Nations inter-agency convoy plan for January and February 2018 requested access to 26 locations in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, with the aim of reaching a total of 844,720 people. Inter-agency convoys are prepared for areas with multisectoral needs where access is limited to ensure that United Nations support is needs-based. Nevertheless, in January no inter-agency convoy was authorized to deploy to any hard-to-reach or besieged locations (see figure III). The last United

Nations inter-agency convoy to a besieged location took place on 28 November 2017, to Nashabiyah in eastern Ghutah, providing assistance to only 7,200 people. This is the worst situation regarding United Nations access to besieged locations since 2015.

22. Individual agencies continued to submit requests for single-agency deliveries to locations throughout the country during the reporting period. Single-agency deliveries are undertaken in areas where access is less challenging. In January, the World Food Programme submitted 1,624 official requests to the authorities to obtain facilitation letters for the transport of food assistance to locations throughout the country, of which 1,567 requests were approved. A total of 56 facilitation letters to dispatch food assistance to the north-east of the country were rejected, affecting the delivery of food assistance for over 260,000 people. UNHCR submitted 29 facilitation letters for the movement of core relief items and livelihood kits. All were approved.

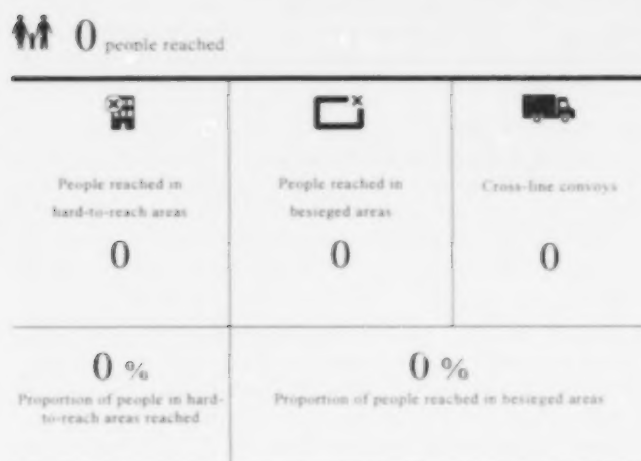
Figure II

United Nations inter-agency cross-line humanitarian operations: percentage of people reached each month in besieged areas



23. The United Nations and its partners continue to provide support to those who have been displaced by fighting in and around Raqqah as part of a coordinated response in the Syrian Arab Republic. The regular programming of United Nations agencies was put on hold for most of January, however, owing to restrictions from Syrian and local authorities. Local authorities in the north-east of the country held up humanitarian convoys twice at the checkpoint with government-controlled areas in eastern Aleppo, halting the supply route for assistance from within the Syrian Arab Republic to the region. Furthermore, local authorities required non-governmental organization (NGO) partners to register with the Kurdish Autonomous Administration. The situation was further compounded by the refusal of the governor of Hasakah to issue facilitation letters for United Nations deliveries. While an agreement was reached with all parties to allow the resumption of humanitarian activity on 30 January, assistance was restricted for much of the month.

Figure III
Inter-agency cross-line humanitarian operations, January 2018



Number of people in hard-to-reach areas: 2.49 million

Number of people in besieged areas: 417,556

Humanitarian response

24. United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners reached millions of people in need in January through all available access modalities, including (a) regular programming from within the Syrian Arab Republic, whereby humanitarian deliveries reached those in need without crossing conflict lines, (b) cross-line operations, whereby assistance from within the country was delivered across conflict lines and (c) cross-border deliveries, whereby assistance was provided to those in need from Jordan and Turkey (see table 1). In addition to the United Nations and its partners, NGOs continued to deliver life-saving assistance to people in need. Local authorities in many areas controlled by non-State armed opposition groups also continued to provide services where possible.

Table 1
People reached by the United Nations and other organizations through all
modalities in January 2018

Organization	Number of people reached
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	20 000
International Organization for Migration	60 489
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	2 688 000
United Nations Children's Fund	1 300 000
United Nations Development Programme	105 178
United Nations Population Fund	330 000
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	360 000
World Food Programme	2 400 000
World Health Organization	826 000

25. During the reporting period, cross-border deliveries continued from Turkey and Jordan into the Syrian Arab Republic under the terms of Security Council resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (see figure IV). In line with those resolutions, the United Nations notified the Syrian authorities in advance of each shipment, including its content and destination, and the number of beneficiaries expected to be reached.

26. Since cross-border operations began in July 2014, following the adoption of Security Council resolution 2165 (2014), the United Nations has conducted more than 734 cross-border consignments, using more than 18,625 trucks (12,756 by way of Bab al-Hawa and 1,847 by way of Bab al-Salam from Turkey, and 4,022 by way of Ramtha from Jordan). The United Nations cross-border operations complement the aid provided by international and Syrian NGOs that provide services to millions more from neighbouring countries.

27. In January, the United Nations and its implementing partners delivered food assistance to more than 650,000 people through cross-border deliveries from Turkey and Jordan (see table 2). Moreover, the United Nations conducted health and medical deliveries, providing more than 223,000 treatments through the cross-border mechanism. In the northern part of the Syrian Arab Republic, UNICEF improved water quality and sanitation for 168,000 people through the repair and rehabilitation of water and sanitation systems, and the distribution of hygiene kits, jerry cans and water purification tablets. In addition, UNICEF screened nearly 40,000 children and pregnant and lactating women for acute malnutrition. Of the children screened, 208 were treated for severe acute malnutrition. UNICEF also enrolled 13,328 children, ranging from 5 to 17 years of age, in formal education. In the southern Governorates of Dar'a and Qunaytirah, more than 440,000 people were able to access clean water following maintenance operations for water and sanitation systems. Of these, 62,380 people were reached with Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All interventions such as household water treatment, water vouchers and rehabilitation and repair of sanitation facilities and of water systems. Humanitarian partners also continued to provide nutritional services in 12 communities in Dar'a Governorate and 10 communities in Qunaytirah Governorate. A total of 6,210 children under the age of 5 were screened for acute malnutrition. Of the children screened, 40 were identified as suffering from moderate acute malnutrition and 17 as suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Those identified and diagnosed were treated through therapeutic and supplementary nutrition programmes in six health centres and one mobile clinic. In addition, 1,426 pregnant and lactating women were screened for acute malnutrition, of whom 47 received necessary treatment.

28. Also during the reporting period, the third oral polio vaccine campaign from inside the Syrian Arab Republic took place between 14 and 18 January, with a total of 665,736 children under the age of 5 vaccinated in Damascus, Hasakah, Aleppo and Rif Dimashq.

29. The first round of cash assistance in 2018 was launched by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on 14 January, targeting up to 418,000 Palestine refugees in need of assistance. By 31 January 2018, a total of 196,592 beneficiaries had received assistance, representing 47 per cent of the target for the round. Beneficiaries are paid \$32/month and receive two months' worth of assistance per round for a total of \$64.

30. UNHCR and its protection partners continued to raise awareness of the importance of civil documentation, as well as of the registration of births, marriages and other events. During the reporting period, 13,825 internally displaced persons in Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Suwayda', Dar'a, Qunaytirah, Tartus, Ladhikiyah, Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Hasakah Governorates directly benefited from the UNHCR legal

assistance programme. Moreover, there are now a total of 90 community centres, 7 satellite centres and 58 mobile units functioning, supported by 2,190 outreach volunteers and providing a wide range of protection-related services to 2.3 million people in 12 governorates.

31. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic continued its operations during the reporting period, monitoring 471 trucks used in 20 consignments by six United Nations entities, confirming the humanitarian nature of each and notifying the Syrian authorities after each shipment. The United Nations provides 48-hour notice to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic for all shipments. Once in the country, United Nations partners ensure that shipments arrive at the designated warehouses. Independent third-party companies contracted by the United Nations ensure independent verification of the assistance arriving at the warehouses and also monitor the distribution and/or service provision. The Mechanism continued to benefit from the excellent cooperation of the Governments of Jordan and Turkey.

Figure IV
Number of beneficiaries targeted by the United Nations and its partners by cluster through cross-border humanitarian deliveries, January 2018

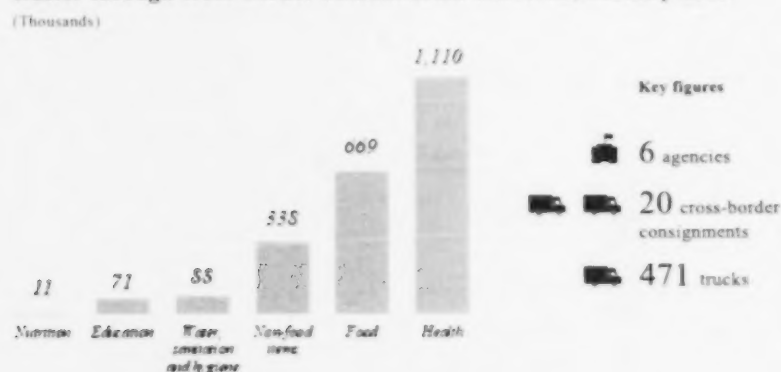


Table 2
Number of targeted beneficiaries through cross-border deliveries by sector and by district, January 2018

Governorate	District	Education	Food	Health	Non-food items	Nutrition	Water, sanitation and hygiene
Aleppo	Bab	0	0	0	37 500	11 100	0
Aleppo	I'zaz	4 500	27 000	3 400	3 000	0	13 814
Aleppo	Jarabulus	0	0	0	1 500	0	28 832
Aleppo	Jabal Sim'an	22 500	18 000	12 485	27 000	0	4 500
Suwayda'	Suwayda'	0	350	0	0	0	0
Dar'a	Sanamayn	0	0	0	5 000	0	0
Dar'a	Dar'a	0	171 154	40 400	43 266	0	0
Dar'a	Izra'	0	74 861	14 000	14 910	0	0
Hama	Suqaylibiyah	0	5 000	0	0	0	0
Idlib	Ma'arrak	0	79 625	13 085	0	0	0
Idlib	Ariha	0	0	180	0	0	0
Idlib	Harim	13 500	204 525	965 480	59 299	0	4 000

Governorate	District	Education	Food	Health	Non-food items	Nutrition	Water, sanitation and hygiene
Idlib	Idlib	30 690	36 000	49 520	12 000	0	29 400
Idlib	Jisr al-Shughur	0	7 500	120	0	0	7 300
Qunaytirah	Fiq	0	2 125	0	10 200	0	0
Qunaytirah	Qunaytirah	0	43 210	11 165	124 739	0	0

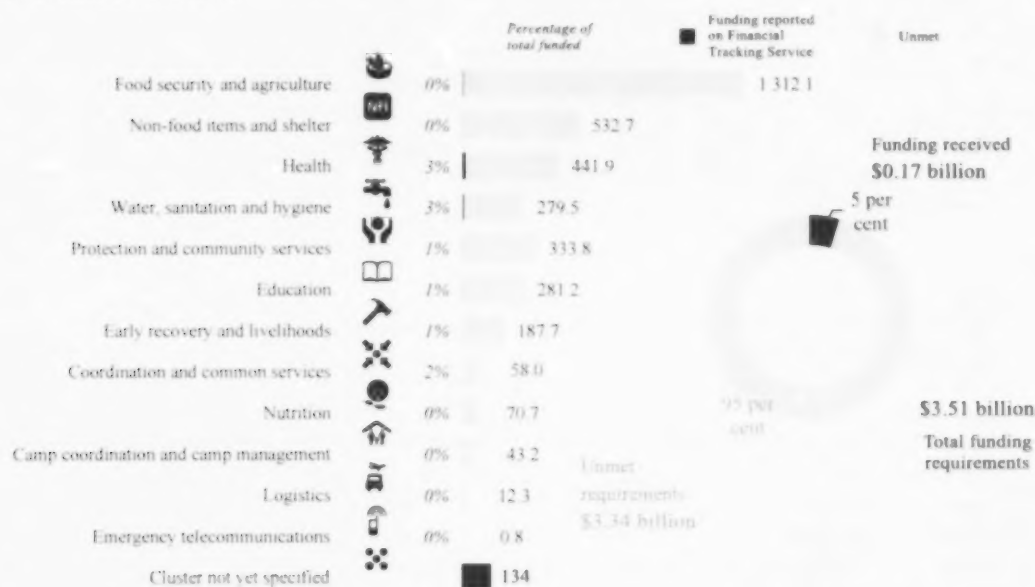
32. Throughout the month of January, the Russian Federation sent information bulletins to the United Nations from the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, which outlined the provision of bilateral relief assistance. Other Member States also continued to provide bilateral and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian financing

33. As at 31 January, the 2018 humanitarian response plan for the Syrian Arab Republic was 4.8 per cent funded, with \$168 million of the \$3.51 billion requested under the plan received.

Figure V
Humanitarian response plan funding, January 2018

(Millions of United States dollars)



Visas and registrations

34. A total of 58 new United Nations visa requests were submitted to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in January. Of those, 29 were approved and 29 remain pending. Of the 31 visa applications submitted in November and December 2017, 2 were approved in January, while 29 remain pending. A total of 66 United Nations visa renewal requests were submitted in January, of which 43 were approved, while 23 remain pending. An additional three requests for visa renewals submitted in late December were approved in January. For some United Nations entities in the

Syrian Arab Republic, a significant number of staff are not in place or cannot be replaced owing to the non-issuance of visas for months despite formal requests.

35. A total of 23 international NGOs are registered with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to operate in the country.

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and premises

36. Programmes of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are implemented in areas affected by frequent clashes among belligerents, airstrikes, regular exchange of indirect artillery fire and asymmetric attacks.

37. Since the start of the conflict, dozens of humanitarian workers have been killed, including 22 staff members of the United Nations or agencies of the United Nations system, of whom 18 were staff members of UNRWA, 66 were staff members or volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and 8 were staff members or volunteers of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Many staff members of international and national NGOs are also reported to have been killed.

38. A total of 27 staff members of agencies and programmes of the United Nations system (1 staff member of the United Nations Development Programme and 26 UNRWA staff members) are being detained or are missing.

39. Two UNRWA vehicles were slightly damaged by shrapnel when a mortar landed on Amin Street in the Alliance area of Damascus, bringing the total number of damaged assets belonging to UNRWA to 44 facilities and 25 vehicles since the beginning of the conflict.

III. Observations

40. The Syrian people are suffering through one of the most violent periods in nearly seven years of conflict, with civilians continuing to bear the brunt of intensified military activity, heavy fighting, airstrikes and besiegement. I am alarmed at new reports of alleged chemical attacks and by the escalation of military activity in eastern Ghouta and Idlib, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries and in the destruction of hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure. There were 28 verified attacks on medical facilities in January alone. Yet, international humanitarian law requires that all parties to the conflict respect and protect medical facilities and personnel, and that they take constant care to spare all civilians and civilian objects. All parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic must strictly abide by their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions. I call on all parties to work for an immediate and unconditional de-escalation of violence and to exercise restraint.

41. It is time to see progress in the key areas highlighted by my Emergency Relief Coordinator following his first visit to the Syrian Arab Republic from 9 to 12 January 2018. These include the finalization of the United Nations humanitarian response plan for 2018, agreement to the medical evacuation of hundreds of critically ill people trapped in besieged eastern Ghouta, agreement to three or four United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent cross-line convoys each week, agreement to United Nations-supported aid convoys from Damascus to Rukban camp in the south-east of the country, and more effective arrangements to enable the United Nations to support the work of NGOs. I call on all Member States to support the United Nations in its call for progress in these key areas, and for those with influence over the parties to work towards this goal.

42. Nevertheless, progress on these issues remains to be seen. The level of humanitarian access remains catastrophic, in particular to the 5.6 million Syrians in acute need. No convoys have reached a besieged area in more than two months; this is the worst situation regarding United Nations access to besieged locations since 2015. There were also limitations on access for all modalities of assistance delivery in January. Medical evacuations continue to be urgently required. International humanitarian law is clear that medical evacuations are an obligation based on medical need alone.

43. Accountability for serious violations is a requirement under international law and central to achieving sustainable peace in the Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court. I also call upon all parties to the conflict, Member States, civil society and the United Nations system as a whole to cooperate fully with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

44. The presence of the United Nations at the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi on 30 January was based on a common understanding between the Russian Federation and the United Nations on the nature and outcome of the meeting and its contribution to the United Nations-led talks in Geneva. The Sochi final statement (see S/2018/121) embraced a vision of the Syrian Arab Republic for all Syrians, as reflected by the 12 principles put forward by my Special Envoy in 2017. It affirmed that the mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure and selection criteria for the composition of a constitutional committee are to be reached under United Nations auspices in Geneva in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which mandates the United Nations to set a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution. It affirmed that such a committee should, at the very least, comprise the Government, opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, Syrian experts, civil society, independent entities, tribal leaders and women, in addition to an adequate representation of the ethnic and religious components of the Syrian Arab Republic.

45. My Special Envoy will now draw on the Sochi outcome to meet our shared goal: the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and of the Geneva Communiqué. I call on the Government and opposition delegations to the United Nations-led intra-Syrian talks, and all States with influence over the parties, to cooperate with my Special Envoy and the United Nations in this important endeavour. I also emphasize that a safe, calm and neutral environment is needed for constitutional and electoral processes to unfold. The legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people depend upon it. I also call for progress with regard to the detainees, abductees and missing people.

46. I must reiterate that progress towards a political settlement needs to be accompanied by progress on the ground for the Syrian people. Syrians need a sustained ceasefire, which must be accompanied by strict respect for international law, in particular the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access based on need, and medical evacuations for the wounded and sick.

Annex

Incidents affecting civilians recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, January 2018*

Damascus and Rif Dimashq Governorates

- On 2 January, ground-based strikes hit a popular market in opposition-controlled Duma, reportedly killing two male civilians.
- On 2 January, airstrikes hit a residential area in opposition-held Harasta, allegedly killing four civilians from a single family, including a woman, a boy and a girl and her mother.
- On 3 January between 1930 and 2015, several airstrikes hit residential areas in the centre of Misraba, damaging or destroying several residential buildings. At least 19 civilians (seven men, nine women, two girls and a boy) were allegedly killed in the shelling, including nine people from a single family. OHCHR received reports that one of the airstrikes hit in the vicinity of the incident as the first responders were operating, reportedly killing one volunteer and injuring another. An estimated 80 civilians, many of them women and children, were allegedly injured in the incident. The rescue team extracted 15 civilians from the rubble.
- On 3 January, ground-based strikes hit a residential area in opposition-held Bayt Siwa, reportedly killing a 3-year-old girl.
- On 3 January around 1945, an airstrike hit a residential building in opposition-controlled Irbin, resulting in its complete collapse and allegedly killing six civilians from a single family from the area, including both parents, two boys and a girl.
- On 4 January around 1400, two ground-based strikes hit in the vicinity of a bakery in the Imarah neighbourhood in the old city of Damascus. One of the rockets exploded, reportedly killing a woman and injuring 13 other civilians.
- On 6 January around 1500, airstrikes reportedly hit a medical facility in Mudayra, reportedly rendering the facility inoperable.
- On 6 January around 1400, several airstrikes hit a residential area of opposition-held Hamuriyah in the vicinity of a shopping area, reportedly killing 17 civilians, including four women, three boys and two girls, in addition to injuring an estimated 50 others. Strikes reportedly damaged or destroyed several residential buildings and shops, allegedly resulting in the displacement of several dozen families.
- On 8 January around 1400, two consecutive airstrikes and numerous ground-based strikes reportedly hit a residential area in the vicinity of a popular market in Duma, reportedly killing 12 civilians, including five boys and a girl.

* In line with Security Council resolution 2258 (2015), the present description of developments on the ground and the incidents that occurred during the month that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been able to corroborate relates to compliance with Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) by all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. The information is provided without prejudice to the work of the Task Force on the Ceasefire of the International Syria Support Group. The reporting is not a comprehensive listing of all violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law that took place in the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period.

- On 8 January in the afternoon, several ground-based strikes hit a residential area in opposition-controlled Saqba, reportedly killing five civilians, including a boy.
- On 8 January in the afternoon, a ground-based strike hit a residential and shopping area in Hamuriyah, allegedly killing an elderly woman and injuring at least seven other civilians.
- On 8 January, airstrikes and ground-based strikes hit a residential area in Mudayra, reportedly killing four civilians, including a boy, a girl and an elderly man, and seriously injuring at least five other civilians, including a child.
- On 9 January around 1045, airstrikes hit a residential area in Saqba, causing the collapse of a building and allegedly killing three civilians, including two boys, and injuring at least 30 other civilians, including numerous women and children.
- On 9 January around 1200, airstrikes and ground-based strikes hit a residential area of Hamuriyah, reportedly killing 24 civilians, including eight women (one of whom was pregnant), six boys and six girls, and injuring at least 30 others, including 15 civilians extracted from the rubble by local first responders. Strikes destroyed several residential buildings, displacing at least 30 families.
- On 9 January, ground-based strikes hit a residential area of the old city of Damascus, reportedly killing at least two civilians, including a woman, and injuring more than 15 other civilians.
- On 12 January, ground-based strikes hit a residential area in Hamuriyah, allegedly killing five civilians from a single family (three of them children, aged 2, 8 and 12) and damaging a residential building.
- On 15 January around 1330, ground-based strikes hit a residential area of Misraba, reportedly killing a male civilian and injuring four other civilians.
- On 20 January around 1015, ground-based strikes hit a residential area in Hamuriyah, and allegedly killing three civilians and injuring at least five others, including a civilian who died the next day.
- On 20 January in the morning, ground-based strikes hit a local market in Duma, reportedly killing a male civilian and injuring at least two others. The location of the incident was hit by another ground-based strike as the local first responder team was providing first aid and evacuating civilians, allegedly killing one first responder and injuring another.
- On 20 January, several residential areas of Duma were hit by ground-based strikes, reportedly killing eight civilians, including a woman, and injuring at least seven other civilians.
- On 22 January, several ground-based strikes hit a residential area in Bab Tuma in the old city of Damascus, reportedly killing eight civilians, including a boy, a girl and two women, and wounding at least 20 other civilians, including a 15-year-old girl, who lost one of her feet.
- On 28 January in the morning, ground-based strikes hit residential areas of Duma, allegedly killing five civilians, including a woman and a girl, and injuring five other civilians, two of them children.

Dar'a Governorate

- On 10 January, the Khalid ibn al-Walid Army conducted a ground incursion in opposition-controlled B'ir Bakar village, which led to armed clashes with armed opposition groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army. Three civilians,

including a boy and a woman, were allegedly killed in the crossfire and at least seven other civilians, three of them children, were injured.

- On 17 January around 1100, several ground-based strikes hit a residential area in the centre of opposition-controlled Nawa, reportedly killing three civilians, including a woman and a nine-year-old boy, and injuring five other civilians.
- On 22 January, an improvised explosive device allegedly killed a secondary school teacher as he was driving in the vicinity of opposition-controlled Da'il town. No party claimed responsibility for the attack. According to the Syrian Arab News Agency, the victim had been involved with the local reconciliation committee.
- On 27 January, a shepherd was reportedly killed by a ground-based strike that hit the vicinity of Da'il.

Aleppo Governorate

- On 9 January, a woman and her female child were allegedly killed when airstrikes hit Jazraya village in southern Aleppo Governorate.
- On 15 January, two women were reportedly killed when airstrikes hit a residential area in opposition-controlled Arnaz village in the western rural area of the Governorate.
- On 16 January between 1100 and 1200, ground-based strikes hit the wahat al-Tufula kindergarten in the Shahba' neighbourhood of Government-controlled Aleppo city, allegedly killing one civilian (the kindergarten bus driver) and injuring five others (a female teacher and four children).
- On 18 January, ground-based strikes reportedly hit a psychiatric hospital in opposition-held I'zaz town in northwest Aleppo, allegedly wounding 11 patients. The facility hosts around 200 patients.
- Also on 18 January, shelling of the Shatt checkpoint on the I'zaz-Afrin road reportedly injured three civilians travelling on the road.
- On 19 January, a woman and her female child were allegedly killed when ground-based strikes hit the main street in opposition-controlled Bab city in eastern Aleppo Governorate.
- On 21 January, airstrikes hit in the vicinity of Anabkeh poultry farm in Jalbara village, Shirawa district of rural Afrin, reportedly killing 11 civilians, including one woman, two boys aged between 1 and 6 years and three girls between ages 6 and 8, and injuring at least nine other civilians. Those affected by the airstrikes were reportedly internally displaced persons from the Ma'arrat al-Nu'man area of Idlib. Turkish armed forces report that no air or land attacks took place in this area on this date.
- On 21 January, airstrikes hit a residential area of Zammar village in southern Aleppo and allegedly killed six civilians, including three women and two children.
- On 23 January, five civilians, including two women and a boy, were allegedly killed by shelling of the Jindayris residential district in western Afrin. Turkish armed forces report that the area did not come under fire during this operation.
- On 25 January during the night, ground-based strikes reportedly hit a civilian house in the Ma'batli district of rural Afrin, reportedly killing seven civilians, including three women, and injuring at least four other civilians, including two

women. Turkish armed forces report that no air or land attacks took place in this area on this date.

Idlib and Hama Governorates

- On 15 January, a video was posted on the Internet reportedly showing a Levant Liberation Organization fighter standing next to a handcuffed man who had allegedly been abducted by the group in Rasm al-Ward village, southern rural Idlib. The fighter called the abductee a "pig and Sunni apostate" for joining the Syrian Arab Army and entering Idlib, and told a couple described as the parents of three men who had been killed to avenge their sons by killing him. The abductee was then shot by the man and the woman, and the fighter stated this was "in revenge of their three 'sons' killed by Government forces".
- On 18 January at around 1600, airstrikes hit a blood bank in opposition-controlled Saraqib city, allegedly causing significant material damage and rendering the facility inoperable.
- On 20 January at around 1500, airstrikes hit a first responder centre in Saraqib city, reportedly causing significant material damage to the building, as well as to equipment.
- On 21 January at around 1600, airstrikes hit residential areas of opposition-controlled Khan Shaykhun, allegedly killing four civilians, one of them a boy, and injured at least five other civilians, including two women and a boy.
- On 21 January at around 1600, several airstrikes hit different areas of Saraqib town in eastern Idlib, including a hospital, reportedly injuring at least three medical staff and extensively damaging the second floor of the facility. The hospital was closed and patients evacuated to other areas, including Idlib city. A school near the hospital also reportedly sustained material damage as a result of the airstrike.
- On 21 January at around 1600, airstrikes hit a private university north of Saraqib, reportedly killing a male technician working in the university who was standing by the entrance gate when it was hit and injuring three students, mainly from glass fragments. The airstrikes reportedly hit the entrance, an amphitheatre, the professors' building, dormitories and the sports building, causing significant material damage. Classes at the facility, which hosts around 5,000 students, were suspended and the university temporarily closed.
- On 23 January, ground-based strikes hit residential areas in opposition-controlled Jisr al-Shughur, allegedly killing two brothers and injuring six other civilians, including two women and two children from the same family. The victims had previously been displaced from Hama.
- On 24 January, airstrikes hit the village of Sanghara near opposition-controlled Ariha, reportedly killing seven civilians, including two women, a boy and a girl, all from the same family, and injuring eight others.
- On the afternoon of 28 January, airstrikes hit residential areas in opposition-controlled Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, reportedly killing six civilians, including three women, a girl and a boy.
- On 29 January at around 0340, airstrikes hit a residential area north of Ma'saran town in Ma'arrat al-Nu'man district, allegedly killing a mother and her four daughters, aged 15, 12, 8 and 5 years. The strikes also allegedly injured four civilians, including a 2-year-old boy from the same family and a 73-year-old man.

- At approximately 0700 on 29 January, airstrikes hit a wholesale potato market north of Saraqib city, reportedly killing 14 civilians, including one woman, and injuring around 15 other civilians. Six trucks filled with potatoes, as well as a few shops, were destroyed by the strikes.
- On 29 January at around 0930, airstrikes hit the entrance of a hospital south of Saraqib city, allegedly killing a male civilian working as a guard and injuring eight others, including a doctor, a nurse and three journalists present to interview those injured from the market incident earlier that day. Significantly damaged by the strikes, the hospital had previously been hit on 21 January and is not currently operational, so the critically injured had to be transferred to other medical facilities.
- On the afternoon of 29 January at around 1330, airstrikes hit a residential area in Saraqib city, as well as a bakery, reportedly killing a boy and injuring two other civilians.
- On the morning of 30 January, airstrikes hit the main Ariha market west of Idlib, allegedly killing at least 13 civilians, including a woman and her two sons, and injuring at least 15 others.
- On 30 January, airstrikes hit residential areas of Khan Shaykhun, reportedly injuring 12 civilians, including women and children.

Dayr al-Zawr Governorate

- On 8 January, two civilians from Kashmah village in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr Governorate were allegedly killed by unexploded ordnance as they were walking in the Matha neighbourhood in the village.
- On 13 January, airstrikes hit the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-controlled village of Hajin in eastern Dayr al-Zawr Governorate, reportedly killing five civilians, including one woman.
- On 13 January, one civilian was allegedly killed when a Syrian Democratic Forces fighter shot him after he failed to stop at a checkpoint controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces in Jazrat al-Buhamid village in the Kasra District of western Dayr al-Zawr.

Raqqah Governorate

- On 15 January, four civilians were killed as a result of unexploded ordnance, including one inside a residence in Raqqah city and one by the railway in northern Raqqah city.



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**Letter dated 20 February 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of
the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to enclose herewith a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the fourth anniversary of the beginning of the military aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine (see annex).

I would appreciate your kind assistance in having the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 34 (a), and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Yuriy Vitrenko
Chargé d'affaires a.i.



**Annex to the letter dated 20 February 2018 from the Chargé
d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the
United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

**Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the
fourth anniversary of the beginning of the Russian Federation
military aggression against Ukraine**

20 February 2018

On February 20, 2014, the Russian Federation initiated a pre-planned military aggression against Ukraine, which resulted in the temporary illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, their attempted annexation and Russia's spreading of the international armed conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. These criminal acts have taken the lives of more than 10,000 people, led to the colossal destruction of the region and driven almost 1.8 million Ukrainians from their homes as internally displaced persons.

The Russian occupation authorities in total disregard of international law resort to large-scale and serious human rights violations on the occupied territories in attempts to break and subdue those who disagree with an aggressive Kremlin policy. Russia blatantly disregards the Order delivered on this case by the International Court of Justice. Russia directly organizes and encourages its proxies to carry out similar activities in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The occupying state resorts to taking Ukrainian citizens hostage and as a result of fabricated cases dozens of people are illegally detained in Russia and in the temporarily occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas. Their release remains one of the main priorities of Ukraine and the international community.

The international community is unanimous in its condemnation of these illegal acts by the Russian aggressor. This is evidenced by numerous decisions of the partner states of Ukraine, United Nations, Council of Europe, OSCE, European Union, NATO and other international organizations.

Ukraine is grateful to its international partners for their explicit stance in favor of protection and restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

A UN peacekeeping mission, deployed throughout the occupied territory of Donbas, including the areas near the temporarily uncontrolled sections of the Ukrainian-Russian border, should become an effective tool for the restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine calls upon the partners to use all appropriate means in order to prevent the escalation of the international armed conflict in the territory of Ukraine caused by the aggressive Kremlin policy; to deploy a UN peacekeeping mission; to force Russia to stop its aggression, human rights violations and support for terrorist activities, to halt the occupation of Crimea and invaded territories of Ukraine's Donbas, as well as to compensate for the damage caused in full.